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More leaders of militant groups going to Congress

By Norman Bordadora and Martin P. Murill

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PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER
THURSDAY, JUNE 3, 2004
Second FRONTPAGE

WEATHER FORECAST

Al-Qaida man captured

By Alcuin Papa

SECURITY forces in Maguindanao have arrested an Arab man with suspected links to Osama bin Laden's al-Qaida international terror network, military officials said yesterday.

Hassan al-Baker, 35, was arrested by a team of immigration and security forces on Tuesday inside a safehouse in Buluan, Maguindanao, Datu Piang town, Mr. Cmdr. Lorenzo commander Maj. Gen. Emmanuel Bautista told reporters in Zamboanga City yesterday.

Bautista said Al-Baker was arrested on suspicion that he was providing funds to Muslim separatists. He was later taken to Manila for further questioning, the general said.

He said Al-Baker had been placed under surveillance a month ago after arriving in Mindanao. The village where he was arrested is a known stronghold of the separatist Moro Islamic Liberation Front.

According to military sources in the south, initial interrogations revealed that Al-Baker—whose name has been variously rendered as Bakir, Bakarpoor and Bakir—was Egyptian and had visited the MILF's Camp Omar about three months ago.

The camp, located in Upper Kabingi, Datu Piang and the headquarters of an MILF brigade, was overrun by the military in 2000.

Al-Baker also revealed under interrogation that he was with five other Egyptians and seven Indonesians at Camp Omar, authorities said.

He also admitted to being an instructor of Arabic and Islamic studies and demolitions, and managed finances and purchases of basic EM students at Camp Omar, they said.

The MILF could not be contacted for comment although the group has long maintained that it has no ties to foreign terrorists.

Al-Baker's arrest came just two days after a suspected bomb expert was arrested in Jolo, Sulu, on Monday.

Bautista yesterday presented to the media Abdulsakar Sahapodi Jilis Jilis, an alleged member of the al-Qaida-linked Abu Sayyaf bandit group, who was found with a cache of explosives when he was arrested on Monday.

He described Jilis as a highly trained explosives expert linked to several bombings in the south. He said his arrest prevented planned terrorist attacks on passenger ships in Mindanao.

"Jilis's man complete and handed assembling these equipment and explosives devices planning to use these against shipping lines particularly those plying the Iloilo-Zamboanga [route], especially the Aboitiz Shipping Lines," Bautista said.

He said the owner of shares had established receiving extortion letters from terrorist groups.

The marine commandant showed an improvised bomb, which was recovered from Jilis, and claimed that it "would sink a ship of medium size."

Comodoro George Ux, commander of the Western Mindanao Naval Forces, described Jilis's arrest as a "big blow" to the local terror groups.

Jilis had allegedly admitted during interrogation that he was behind the series of bombings in Sulu that left four persons, including a member of an explosive and ordnance unit, dead.

The authorities also displayed dozens of 2MP dynamite sticks, blasting caps, five 81-mm mortar shells equipped with timing devices, a car remote control and cell phones recovered into bomb detonators, which were allegedly found in Jilis's possession. With reports from Julie S. Alipala, PDI Mindanao Bureau, and AFP

TERROR SUSPECT Abdulsakar Sakapodilis (R) presented to media by Western Commander Maj.Gen. Emmanuel Bautista.

3 RP soldiers wounded in Iraq

By Jerome Aning

THREE soldiers who are part of the Philippine humanitarian contingent in Iraq were slightly injured after insurgents vandal their convoy in a village in the southern province of Babil on Tuesday.

Ambassador Roy Cimatu, head of the government's task agency Iraq Team, identified the Filipino soldiers as Capt. Reuben Custodio, T/Sgt. Nestor Bautista and PFC Manuel Cayco.

Custodio, Bautista and Cayco sustained wounds in the left forearm, left brow and left buttock. It would be recalled that Cayco was also injured on Feb. 17 during a suicide bomb attack on Camp Charlie in Babil's capital of al-Hillah, where the Philippine contingent is based.

Cimatu said the three were flown by a helicopter to a military hospital in Camp Lima, Barbala, and were out of danger.

He said Custodio, Bautista and Cayco were among the 19 Filipino soldiers who were on their way to turn over a school project in the village of Taleyya in al-Kout district, south of al-Hillah.

Travelling with them were several Polish soldiers and four American personnel from the coalition authority in Iraq who were documenting the activities of the humanitarian mission.

Armed insurgents opened fire as the seven-vehicle military convoy in the outskirts of the village around 1 p.m. (6 p.m., Manila time). The truck, where the injured Filipinos were, was leading the convoy.

"It is unfortunate that there are some elements trying to undermine the efforts of our humanitarian contingent at this point in time when there is already hope in the country with the approaching return of Iraqi sovereignty," Cimatu told reporters in a briefing.

Cimatu noted that Babil was one of the most peaceful provinces in Iraq unaffected by the insurgency. He said the good relationship between the Filipino soldiers and villagers they were working with was one of the "success stories" that have been recognized by the United States-led coalition in Iraq.

Cimatu explained that the contingent had formed several groups of civil-military action teams, which in the past few days had been going to Taleyya to determine from the Iraqi villagers the other needs of the school.

B.E.S.T. in the Philippines

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PNP bares plot for KNP walkout

No such plan, says Sotto

By Christine F. Esguerra

LEGISLATORS allied with Fernando Poe Jr.'s KnoNorte ng Naghihirang Pilipino will stage a "dramatic walkout" from the ongoing Congress event as soon as votes from the Poe bailiwicks of Pangasinan and Nueva Ecija are canvassed, a top police official said.

The official furnished the bayonne with a copy of a three-page "sequence of canvass" in which Poe is shown defeating President Macapagal-Arroyo with a combined haul of 827,100 in the two provinces.

The KNP legislators will use the "sequence of canvass" which Congress will follow in the canvassing of votes for presidential and vice presidential candidates as a guide for the walk-out, the police official said in an interview.

"The KNP congressmen know (that) because the elections in their bailiwicks have been completed, Congress will have already canvassed a total of 111 COCs, with Poe leading by a slim margin.

But then Mr Macapagal will recover and gain votes for good as the canvassing of COCs from Metro Manila, where she is supposed to have defeated Poe by 528,926 votes.

The final tally will show the President winning a fresh six-year term by 1,218,044, according to the canvass sequence.

The final tally would show Mr Macapagal getting 12,889,886 votes against Poe's 11,761,962.

The PNP official said the KNP legislators want to forestall the unfavorable final outcome and plan on staging the walk-out as soon as the Nueva Ecija and Pangasinan results come in which would have Poe leading Mr Macapagal in the count.

The KNP legislators will be joined by prominent mobilized by Fr. Joe Dizon's Pentecost, an alleged alliance of Iloc partisans and the Communist Party of the Philippines that is working to unseat Macapagal-Arroyo.

Should the walk-out attract tens of thousands of protesters, the alliance would then allegedly stage a people power uprising at the Edsa shrine in Ortigas, the site of two peaceful revolutions that toppled two presidents in 20 years.

A top-level PNP meeting tackled this "worst-case" scenario early this week in which measures to foil a reported destabilization plot were fleshed up.

In the meeting, the National Capital Region Police Office was instructed to strengthen intelligence gathering and deploy more anti-riot officers in areas like the Mendiola grounds. The MCIG will be tasked to civil disturbance management zone from Central Luzon and Calabarzon.

Part of the worst-case scenario drawn up by the PNP was a constitutional crisis resulting from the continued delay in the congressional canvass that would prevent the proclamation of a new President by June 30.

Participating security officials at the top level meeting supposedly all agreed that "there should be a proclamation."

A National Intelligence Coordinating Agency report identified the Edsa uprising as the culmination of the alliance's four-stage plot.

The first three stages reportedly calls for its supporters to "debar the congressional canvass, discredit the credibility of the presidential and vice presidential election results, and create a situation to justify a walk-out."

Railroading the canvass

Sen. Vicente Sotto III, Poe's campaign manager, yesterday denied that the Poe camp planned to stage a walk-out once Poe is elected to the leading in the canvass.

But Sotto said that there would indeed be a walk-out if the administration bloc railroads "unacceptable" and "illegal" rulings during the canvassing.

Sotto said the administration wanted to preempt the opposition because the Macapagal camp was getting nervous over Poe's lead.

"The only thing that will make the opposition walk out is if they (the administration) insists on something wrong," Sotto said in a mixture of English and Filipino.

"Perhaps they are planning to insist on something wrong or to railroad the process. They are preempting the opposition," Sotto also said.

He said the PNP report on the walkout "must be part of the (administration's) script."

Another opposition leader, Antonio Rep. Bel. Jaller dispute Castillo yesterday denied any opposition plan to walk out of the canvassing.

Castillo said what the opposition has decided was to file a petition before the Supreme Court to stop the "illegal canvassing" by a 22-member joint committee created by Congress.

He maintained that only the entire Congress can canvass the votes for the two top positions, not a mere joint committee.

Castillo said a walk-out was not even being considered as an option.

With the present make-up of Congress, there is no way the minority could win against the majority since all their objections were never considered, she said.

"We have a way of making them see our point. That is why we went to the court because it is only the Supreme Court that can give us a credible interpretation of the Constitution," Castillo said. With reports from Carlito Pablo and Cynthia D. Balana

MEMORIAL DAY

A young boy helps his father lay American and Philippine flags on the grave of a US soldier at the American Cemetery and Memorial in Fort Bonifacio, Taguig. Numerous volunteer Americans and Filipinos laid flags on the 27,000 graves in the cemetery on Sunday, the eve of US Memorial Day. The US holiday commemorates the heroism of soldiers who died in defense of freedom. Americans, US Embassy Chargé d'Affaires Joseph Mussomeli, in his remarks at the ceremony attended by the local American community and Philippine government officials, noted that American and Filipino soldiers did not die in vain. "If we remain faithful to these values, to ferociously defend liberty, to fiercely safeguard the dignity of our enemies, and to fervently strive to find reasons to avoid war."

Erap calls for sobriety hailed

DEPOSED Secretary Edwardo Ermita yesterday welcomed jailed ex-president Estrada's recent call for sobriety as cautions of destabilization plots showed amid the slow pace of the canvass of the election results for President and Vice President in Congress.

In a statement, Ermita yesterday said Estrada "displayed an exemplary act of statesmanship" when he issued the appeal on May 30 to "keep calm and allow democratic processes" to take their course.

He said Estrada's statement struck "a very constituting issue" to the opposing sides in the political contest.

Partners of destabilization attempts have spread amid post election tensions and the military has been maintaining a "red alert" status since last week.

Estrada, who is detained on plunder charges in Camp Capinpin, Tanay, Rizal, threw his support behind opposition standard bearer Fernando Poe Jr. His vice friend, Ma'am Pepe

No coup, Gringo pledges

By Carlito Pablo

No coup, no destabilization.

Sen. Gregorio "Gringo" Honasan, the man the military and police intelligence communities suspect of fomenting plots to grab power to take advantage of post election tensions, gave this assurance yesterday.

"Yes, that is an assurance that has been marked by my advocacy in the process," Honasan said in a phone interview.

Honasan, who makes charge of "bullet security" for actor Fernando Poe Jr., had signed an accord with the ruling Lakas-Christian Muslim Democrats pledging to help in the conduct of honest elections and support for the programs of the Macapagal administration.

Honasan was recently visited by President Macapagal-Arroyo and Speaker Jose de Venecia. It was a consultant in peace negotiations with communist and Muslim secessionist rebels.

Honasan said he was open to accepting such an invitation.

"I am morally obliged to accept the offer from any administration if President who will be proclaimed or before June 30. I will have to accept whether the offer is from GMA (Gloria Macapagal) or FPJ (Poe), whoever is proclaimed," Honasan said.

As he has access to constituents of national held by the Poe camp, canvassing the tally of votes for presidential candidates, Honasan was asked who he believed won the elections.

"I will not jump into that trap. I don't want to preempt Congress," he said.

Honasan said that "premature claims" about who won the presidential elections so far were to his intention.

He said what was important was to determine who between the President and Poe received a clear mandate from the people.

He said that as head for bullet security for Poe, his job was to provide opposition lawyer with information for the decisions were conducted.

Asked to confirm opposition claims of massive fraud perpetrated by the administration, Honasan declined a categorical statement.

"That is for our lawyers to evaluate," he said.

He said he has been regularly informing De Venecia about his activities as a sign of good faith.

10 YEARS IN RP

The Philippine Postal Corp. has issued a rare commemorative postage stamp to mark Pfizer's 50th anniversary in the country. The official launch of the stamp, held recently at the Filipino Heritage Library in Makati, highlighted Pfizer's reaffirmation of its commitment to care for and serve the Filipino people's healthcare needs for years to come. Gracing the event and witnessing this milestone were (from left) Pfizer president and country manager Ray Gerardo Escarts, Postmaster General Antonio de Gutierrez, Health Undersecretary Alexander Padilla and Trade and Industry Secretary Cesar Purisima.

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AGRI FUND SCAM

Prove it, Defensor challenges Chavez

By Gil Cabacungan Jr. and Armand N. Nocum

AGRICULTURE Secretary Michael Defensor rejected anew political opportunism for the President, offered to resign from the Cabinet should former Solicitor General Frank Chavez prove that his sister, Quezon City District III Rep. Maite Defensor, had requested and obtained P1 million in funds from the Department of Agriculture.

"I challenge Frank Chavez to release any letter request by my sister to the DA for the agriculture funds and I would resign," said Defensor via a briefing in Malacañang.

All Cabinet secretaries have been asked by the President to submit their courtesy resignations.

Defensor said his sister Maite never made a request or obtained any funding from the DA's Countering Hunggerang Aid (CHA) program and that disbursements of the agricultural funds require official communication between agencies.

But Defensor was inadvertently included in the DA's list of program beneficiaries it submitted to the Department of Budget and Management. Defensor asked Chavez to spare Maite from intrigue because she is leaving politics to devote more time to her child.

Not eligible

He noted that Quezon City, being a commercial and residential center, is not eligible for agricultural funds for the irrigation and farm inputs, which is why during Defensor's term as congressman-in-charge-of-the-DA, he did not touch the P5-million allocation from the DA fund.

In a related development, Chavez wants one of the top government prosecutors who helped smear ousted President Joseph Estrada to head a panel that would work to impeach President Macapagal-Arroyo.

In a "motion to resolve" he filed before the Office of the Ombudsman, Chavez asked that Special Prosecutor Dennis Villa-Ignacio head a "panel of three investigators" to look into the plunder case against the President.

Villa-Ignacio declined to comment until he sees the motion.

Chavez had filed plunder charges against the Macapagal-Arroyo allegedly dipping into agricultural funds worth P728 million now marked for the purchase of fertilizers and farm inputs, that she distributed to congressmen, governors and mayors who helped her campaign.

Chavez said he was laying the basis for the President's impeachment.

He has submitted an affidavit-in-chief to back the funds released to 105 congressmen, 53 governors and 23 mayors announced to only P728 million. The militant group Bantihang Lakas ng Elitong Simulakyan said another P291 million was also released days before the start of the campaign period.

In a motion filed last Tuesday afternoon, Chavez also asked Ombudsman Simeon Marcelo to "prohibit himself from participating in the investigation and/or deliberations of this complaint ... because he is an appointee of His Macapagal-Arroyo."

In the event the complaint is dismissed, Chavez would assert that this was "on account of the Ombudsman's partiality toward" the President, he said.

Honest-to-goodness check

Meanwhile, Bukidnon Rep. Juan Miguel Zubiri, who claims he had set upon the P5 million allegedly released by the DA to his congressional district office, has asked the Commission on Audit to conduct an honest-to-goodness check of the DA's funds.

The auditing of the material deliveries is the more than P1 billion Countering Hunggerang Aid funds, he said, would "never be subject to overpricing or under-delivery scam committed."

Any finding of irregularity should be used as basis for the filing of appropriate charges against DA officials or suppliers involved," he said. "Let the ax fall on the guilty regardless that this government will not condone fraud scam."

Chavez said that as much as 23 percent of the funds allegedly went to DA Undersecretary Jocelyn Bolante, 20 percent to the executive officials, 20 percent to the suppliers and 23 percent to Bolante's sources in the DA.

Explain HS bridge plan, DepEd ordered

By Philip C. Tubeza

THE COURT of Appeals has ordered the Department of Education to explain its controversial "bridge program" for incoming high school students after a party-list group asked the court to stop it.

Education Secretary Edilberto de Jesus has 10 days to comment on the petition of the Advocates and Alliances of Social Justice for School Teachers and Allied Workers (AASJS) to block the DepEd project.

AASJS wants the bridge program stopped claiming that it was "unnecessary, unreasonable, discriminatory and oppressive".

The program would compel about 700,000 incoming public high school freshmen to go through a one-year "bridge program" before entering regular high school.

The number represents half of the 1.4 million incoming high school freshmen who are not expected to make the cut in the High School Readiness Test given last May 24.

The program is supposed to address the learning gaps of high school students in Math, English and Science subjects, as shown by their low performance in the National Diagnostic Tests.

Students must attend the two-hour sessions that employ a combination of "modular, self-paced and guided learning and face-to-face, whole-class instruction."

Lawyer Sarnate Abrahim, the AASJS head, said the money allotted for the program should instead be used to improve elementary education.

"This is an admission on the part of [De Jesus] that students have been allowed to graduate from public elementary schools [even though they had] deficiencies in English, Science and Mathematics," Abrahim said.

The bridge program perpetuates a deficient elementary school system, he said.

Abrahim said the remedial program remains "unreasonable and unbearable" since it would impose an additional financial burden on the parents and more workload on the teachers.

The parents would need to spend money for the transportation, food and other needs of their children, which many parents may not be able to afford, he said.

Abrahim added that students assigned to the program would also have to spend time that money to go to the required training sessions.

He said the students required to attend the program would bear the stigma "throughout their lives" of being considered intellectually deficient and belonging to the group of students who did not do well academically.

He added students who flunk the High School Readiness Test may also be forced to transfer to private schools that charge higher tuition.

RP touted as top rice producer

THE PHILIPPINE government's massive propagation of the hybrid rice known as "Glenda rice" has spawned a rice revolution in the countryside and sought the interest of major rice importing countries, especially after the United Nations General Assembly's (UNGA) declaration of 2004 as the International Year of Rice.

Japan, Malaysia and Indonesia are among the countries which have expressed their interest in importing the hybrid rice seed seeds being produced in the Philippines, according to Philippe J. Lhuillier, Philippine ambassador to Italy and concurrent permanent representative of the Philippines to the FAO's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

Lhuillier, in a press statement, said that the Philippines has been tested by the FAO as one of the countries best on solving its poverty and hunger problems.

The Philippines increased its palay production by 11.27 million metric tons in 2002 resulting in a 95 percent self-sufficiency level and is expected to be fully self-reliant in the next two years because of the massive planting of the hybrid rice by local farmers, he said.

Lhuillier said the Philippine delegation to the 33rd regular session of 45 rice producing nations have earlier asked the UNGA to declare 2004 as the International Year of Rice.

"The declaration seeks to propel increased international support to the sustainable development of rice-based production systems of rice producing countries that will go beyond 2004," he said.

Forces for the Year of Rice includes a sustained focus on rice awareness, holding of rice festivals, exhibits of rice-inspired paintings, and production of issued and various media forms.

It's Biazon for 12th slot by 10,685 votes

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a seance, I would even say that he would seem to be more than qualified to be a senator. He has a track record to show to the people," Biazon said.

At about 3:30 p.m., he issued remarks while Comelec Chair Benjamin Abalos was reading the resolution proclaiming him the winner.

Biazon thanked the Comelec for the "expeditious resolution" of the issues regarding the 12th slot.

He then thanked those who voted for him and the Liberal Party, which, he said, supported him throughout the elections.

Asked on ANC News Channel if he intended to file any election protest, Barbers said: "It really depends on my lawyers. But if everything is all right and in perfect order, I see great value [in not doing so]," he said.

Barbers said he had received a lot of reports on the field about possible irregularities.

"But I was not able to count accurate proof. In that case ... I cannot arbitrarily charge anybody without an iota of evidence. I have been pronouncing many times that if I don't see any irregularities I cannot file any case," he said.

Barbers, however, said it was a "close and very good fight."

Cabinet post

Malacañang yesterday hinted it might give Barbers a Cabinet position to cheer him up after losing to Biazon.

According to her campaign spokesperson Michael Defensor, President Macapagal-Arroyo was aware of Barbers' contribution to her administration and to her election campaign, and that she could not guarantee a win.

"I believe there's a chance and position for the senator in the Future, even possibly, a Cabinet position," Defensor said.

The President's spokesperson Ignacio Bunye

More leaders . . .

Front page A1

the Partido ng Manggagawa, Benjamin Cruz of the Bald Painters Party, Rodolfo Magsaysay of the Alliance Volunteers Educators, Ernesto Gildayo of the Veterans Freedom Party, Guillermo Cua of Coop Natco, Florencio Noel of the Nacag, Mejes Hussman of Anak Mindanao, and Rodante Marcoleta of Abagad.

Balance

Cardin said the experience of the first Bayan Muna representatives showed the importance of learning how to balance the need to be critical with the need to be effective in pushing progressive legislation.

"I am giving myself six months to learn the right mix," said Cardin, secretary general of the Bagong Alyansang Makabayan.

He said he will "critique" it being called "compromises."

"There is this danger of things getting to your head. You attend committee hearings, attend the plenary three times a week and then other meetings outside," Cardin said.

"The job of being with the masses might suffer," he said.

Progressive bloc

Bayan Muna, Anakpawis and Gabriela said they had formed a veritable "progressive" bloc in the new Congress with its representatives among them.

"This electoral triumph is especially dedicated to the 43 martyred members of our party who laid their lives in pursuit of the politics of change," said Ocampo, who will return to the House as the party-list group's first nominee.

Beltran and Maza were the other two representatives of Bayan Muna when it won overwhelmingly in the 2001 elections.

Beltran and Maza resigned in the middle of their term to strengthen the labor, peasant and urban poor group Anakpawis and the women's advocacy group Gabriela.

Ocampo said the entry of three more representatives from the ranks of "progressive" party-list groups signals the start of a progressive bloc in Congress.

"We will continue to press for justice for their deaths, and pursue the ideals they had lived and fought for inside and outside the halls of Congress," Ocampo said.

Massive Red scare

Bayan Muna and its allied party-list groups launched the efforts of the administration to vilify their organizations as legal fronts of the Communist Party of the Philippines and the New People's Army.

The groups particularly hinged their criticisms on the alleged military harassment and the disqualification threats by National Security Adviser Roilo Golez-Gonzalez.

"Why the disqualification issue only now when we've already been proclaimed? Understandably for Mr. Gonzalez, the people have seen through his witch-hunting plot. Despite the massive red scare and hate campaign launched against us, the people have again given us their mandate along with several of our allied party-list groups," Ocampo said.

Cardin said the allies of Bayan Muna would have garnered more seats had it not been for the vilification campaign of the administration.

Veritable swing vote

"We were initially expecting to gain eight to 12 seats from our group," he said.

Apart from Anakpawis and Gabriela, other organizations that allied themselves with Bayan Muna were the youth group Anak ng Bayan, the overseas Filipino worker group Migrante, and the Muslim party-list Suara Bangsamoro.

All six groups have been branded by Golez as fronts for the CPP-NPA.

"Had we gained three seats, we would have been a veritable swing vote in Congress," Cardin said.

He welcomed the proclamation of Biazon, which would push to seven the number of administration candidates who won in the senatorial race. The opposition won five.

"The G-7 candidates fought hard and fought well. We would have wanted to have more candidates included in the Top 12," Bunye said.

Biazon's proclamation came eight days after the Comelec proclaimed the 11 other winners of the senatorial race.

On May 24, the poll body declared the winners of Manuel "Mar" Roxas II, Ramon "Bong" Revilla Jr., Aquilino "Nene" Pimentel Jr., Maria Ana Consuelo "Jamby" Madrigal, Richard Gordon, Pia Juliano-Cayetano, Wilfrido Ordonez-Santiago, Alfredo Lim, Juan Ponce Enrile, Jinggoy Estrada and Manuel "Lito" Lapid.

Delayed

The Comelec put off the proclamation of the 12th winner because uncounted votes at that time could still affect the standings of the candidates holding the 12th and 13th slots. Biazon led Barbers by 19,792 votes in the Comelec tally of votes last week.

In the tally of the votes from Graduate City yesterday, Biazon got 13,826 votes and Barbers, 3,824. In a barangay in Dapas, Nueva Ecija, Biazon was also able to pick up three more votes over Barbers, boosting his lead to 10,806.

However, Biazon's lead was drastically reduced when votes from Lanao del Sur were counted.

Barbers garnered 24,771 votes compared with Biazon's 1,438, a difference of 23,283 votes.

The counting of votes from Graduate City and several municipalities in Lanao del Sur was delayed after several acts of boycott of vote counters did not function.

Fears of shooting were also raised after it was learned that some boards of canvassers were sitting on election results, waiting for the results of special elections.

Yesterday, Barbers' lawyer asked the Comelec to hold the proclamation pending the canvassing of all votes, adding that he wanted to know if Barer would still be special elections in some Maguindanao and Sulu student towns.

Apparently, he was referring to about four towns which Abalos said he'd "double proclamations." Local elections still daily proclaimed two winning candidates for one municipality.

The Comelec chief merely told Barbers's lawyer that no special elections were going to be held in those towns.

He reiterated that the lead of Biazon was more than 19,000 and this would not be affected by the votes from barangays in Lanao, which he placed at 10,000 votes.

Agreement

Abalos then revealed that the camps of Barbers and Biazon had forged an agreement the other day.

"We are addressing [now the creation and the propriety among people wanting another one party. If in Graduate, Biazon's lead is affected, we would go to Lanao," Abalos said in open court.

"But if after this canvass, Biazon still leads, it will be academic," he added.

Biazon said political advertisements had been a major factor in the last elections.

Compared to the senatorial election in 1992, 1995 and 1998, the "rules have changed" on account of the lifting of the ban on political advertisements, Biazon said.

The senator, along with Pimentel, lost in 1995 due to vote padding and cheating.

"Of course, the fight is not in the background, but within the institutional process," Biazon said.

"I almost did not make it. I put up political ads the last three weeks ... because people didn't know that I was running," he said.

He said the ads should have leveled the playing field among popular and not so popular senatorial candidates, but these had created another division between the moneyed class and the poor. With a report from Cet C. Gobaco-Lopez Jr.

Aussie model crowned Miss Universe

Posted page A1

swimwear and an illuminated swimming pool.

But "never-exposed" victory, the announcer uttered said, "This is very new to me and I'm very excited," she told reporters later in a news conference.

Her sassy blond hair and ultra-fitted gold gown diminished as she executed the traditional walk along the 18 meter runway after receiving the crown—studded with 800 diamonds and worth $250,000—from outgoing Miss Universe Amelia Vega of the Dominican Republic.

Describing this part of the program, the Associated Press reported: "Hawkins walked down the runway smiling, waving, and looking stunned by her victory."

Hannah Pinsmaty of the United States, a 25-year old graduate school student who has published a children's book, took second place. Miss Puerto Rico, Mia Reyes, 22, an aspiring doctor, came in third.

This is the second time that no American has won the pageant since it began in 1952. Harry Kanee Belafonte took the crown in 1972.

Hawkins, who describes herself as "vivacious," will receive an undisclosed yearly salary as Miss Universe, an ample wardrobe and a $40,000 scholarship at a New York film school.

Asked during the pageant what period in history she would choose to live in if she had her pick, a smiling Hawkins quickly answered "This time."

'Spectacular'

The TV special was produced jointly by pageant owner Donald Trump, a New York real estate developer, and NBC Television. Actress Bo Derek, music producer Emilio Estefan and supermodel Petra Nemcova were among the judges.

Special prizes were to Miss Panama Jessica Rodriguez for Best Traditional Costume, runner-up Zinzelle Negrin for Most Photogenic and Miss India Lara Dutta for Most Elegant.

With Donald Trump

At the news conference, Hawkins arrived with Trump, who announced: "I want to present to you the new Miss Universe. She's spectacular ... the most beautiful Miss Universe I have seen in many, many years."

"I had no idea this was going to happen to me," Hawkins said, appearing nervous. "It was completely beyond my imaginations. I have a lot to learn about being Miss Universe, but I'm going to give it my all."

In Sydney, her mother Gail was quoted as saying: "We're all so proud and so excited for her. I just wish I was there to give her a big cuddle. It's really hard to believe. I wonder if it's sunk in with her yet. I don't think she realizes the attention she has gotten."

Problem hair

Fifteen contestants were chosen—but not announced—in a preliminary "beauty test" and evening gown showdown on Thursday. That group was reduced to 10 before the five finalists were named.

Before the pageant began, singer Gloria Estefan defended the country from critics who labeled the event "frivolous."

"It is beautiful and very good power to convince, and we have seen many times who have done a great job," said the Cuban-American singer, who performed during the show. "The new Miss Universe should do a spectacular job bringing the world."

The final results were announced the chrise of hundreds of Ecuadorans who attended a presentation event last week that introduced the contestants.

A GLITZY remake and gown affair, the 53rd annual Miss Universe contest was a parade of stunners like (from left) Miss Trinidad and Tobago Danielle Jones, Miss Australia Jennifer Hawkins (Miss Universe), Miss Puerto Rico Alba Reyes, Miss USA Shandi Finnessey and Miss Paraguay Larissa Gonzalez.

Ian Lopez

Miss Ecuador Susana Rivadeneira, 24, received the biggest applause from the contestants, followed by Miss Turkey Sinin Seguino, 22, and Miss Belgium Valerie Claeys, 24.

None of the three made it to the final round.

Beloved

The pageant—hosted by Ecuadorean actress Dany Parente and Billy Bush of Access Hollywood—also drew some 300 journalists from around the world who, in one poll, were beloved by Miss Bolivia Gabriela Oviedo.

Oviedo said the journalists acted as though all Bolivians were uneducated buffoons.

She pointed out that while the Bolivian administration required of La Paz might be full of poor, illiterate people, in the east, people like her self were tall and white ... and spoke English.

The accusations of racism in Ecuador, which has a large native population, was in such a level that Bolivia's vice minister of culture, Maria Alvarez Plata, stepped in to explain why the thought journalists had "unnecessarily demeaned" the young woman. "She expressed herself in English."

One other participant with regrets was former juror Kimmie Jackson, a finalist on reality TV show "The Apprentice," in which he appeared with Trump. Jackson was released from the jury for speculating with bookmakers on the Miss Universe wager. He bit bounty queens were staying, and greeting the candidates at the lobby.

Tourist plug

The jury members also included Thom Mount of Orbit Group, fitness magazine; Venezuelan editor Edmee Betancourt and Miss Universe 1999 Wendy Fitzwilliam.

Given the job "to sanitize the interest" of the contestants was yoga instructor Marcia de la Cruz. And keeping the jurors were 1,400 police officers, civil defense personnel, firefighters and the Red Cross workers.

Preselection hoped the competition would showcase the beauty of their country and attract tourists. Six minutes of the program spotlighted attractions ranging from the unique flora and fauna of the Galapagos Islands, to ecotourist volunteers, highland Indian communities and the lush vegetation of the Amazon jungle. *Reports from AP, Agence France-Presse and Reuters*

Canvassing rules challenged at high court

Posted page A1

Let's compare evidence, Palace dares opposition

By Cl.C. Catanungan Jr.

MALACAÑANG is challenging the opposition to lay its documentary evidence alongside those of the administration, to once and for all settle the matter of who won in the May 10 presidential race.

"Let us name the time and place and we will be there with our documents. I hope they won't chicken out if they really have the goods," Michael Defensor, President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo's political spokesperson, narrowly said of the Koalisyon ng Nagkakaisang Pilipino's claim that it had proof of massive fraud.

Defensor expressed confidence that the KNP had no concrete proof to back its claim that the administration had manipulated the election results to ensure Mrs Macapagal's victory over its standard bearer Fernando Poe Jr.

He said the sheer lack of substance was the reason why the KNP's calls for mass protests had yet to gain ground.

Responding to Defensor, Congressman Edcel Lagman of Albay said the challenge was ill-advised without any request at all by the simple expedient of the so-called rules of Congress[1] he said.

Lagman said Congress had no authority to deprive any of its members their rights and prerogatives.

"Every member of Congress—regardless of the constituency of [the institution] of representation and voice in the legislature... must—especially in the choice and determination of the public officials to serve them," he said, adding that this is "in the highest degree, undemocratic, unjustifiable and unconstitutional."

'More than ministerial'

A true former immigration chief Nereo Rodriguez, a former of Lupes and of Mrs's Nacionalista ng Nagkakaisang Pilipino, also actually like the petition.

Rodriguez said the petition would not delay the canvass because he was convinced the Supreme Court would immediately rule on the matter.

He said that unlike the previous Charters, the 1987 Constitution vests Congress "with more than merely ministerial and executive functions" in the canvassing procedures.

He also said Congress was "more than the sum of its parts" to deny him the authority and due execution of the CoCs from the provincial and city board of canvassers.

Thus, Rodriguez said, "there can be no constitutionality for any legality possessed by delegation of such tasks to any person or entity other than that specified, named and designated in the Constitution itself."

Antipas del Rio Rep. Prospero Pichay and Davao City Rep. Prospero Nograles, both of the ruling Lakas-CMD, said they saw no reason why the Supreme Court would uphold the legality of the joint committee.

On track

Nograles, a member of the committee, said it would recommend on its canvassing duty in Congress would meet its deadline for the proclamation of the winners and preserve a leadership vacuum.

"The opposition can file the petition but we will remain on track in the determination of the presidential and vice presidential winners while the high court decides on [the matter]," he said.

Pichay said the filing of the petition was part of the dilatory tactics of the opposition, which, he pointed out, was aware that its camp is handicapped by the unofficial count of the National Citizens' Movement for Free Elections.

Social volcano

Rep. Rito Bernardo Lokin of the party-list group Ulodong Bulol Against Corruption (Ubac) likened the close race of the contest to a "social and political volcano."

Lokin, one of three opposition lawmakers appointed to the House panel of the joint committee, said she was confident the Supreme Court would realize that delaying the proceedings further could bring about more tension.

"I think the justices will see that as social and political volcano that might erupt anytime soon, and, therefore, they might refuse to get involved," Lokin said.

"I think the republican canvassing of votes will in fact defuse the building tension, after such a bitterly fought electoral contest," she added. *With a report from Cynthia D. Balana*

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Oslo talks resume this month

By TJ Burgonio

PEACE negotiations between the government and the communist-led National Democratic Front (NDF) are set to resume in Norway this month despite delays in the weeks from the presidential elections, a member of the rebel panel said yesterday.

Wendel Mercaptal Arcayo, who was one of the Fernando Poe Jr. in the May 10 elections based on exit polls, had earlier approved the schedule for the June 22-25 formal negotiations Oslo, and there was no indication that it had been cancelled, according to Abid Agcaoili, member of the NDF peace panel.

Agcaoili said the NDF, the political wing of the New People's Army, would press ahead with the talks whatever a proclaimed president between Mr Macapagal and Fernando Congress.

"Whoever wins in the contesting or the incoming Presidency, we are ready to talk peace with him or her... But in, if he or she is ready to talk peace with us," Agcaoili said at a press briefing in Quezon City.

Head talks@ in Congress has been delayed for more than a month now because of debates over common rules. It is expected to be further delayed when the filing yesterday of a petition by the opposition asking the Supreme Court to stop the canvass of votes by a 23-member committee, which resumed it and was unconstitutional.

Agenda

Socio-economic reforms, including national patrimony, industrialization and land reform, top the agenda of the third round of talks this month.

The two panels had agreed in past meetings to create a joint monitoring committee that will look into the human rights violations by both parties. Under the agreement reached in April, it was scheduled to be operational this week, Agcaoili said.

Agcaoili reminded the new president to abide by the agreements hammered out in previous negotiations if and when talks resume during their term of office.

Crespo to "Ka Roger" Rosal, spokesperson of the NPA, said communist guerrillas had no plans of taking part in any destabilization plot against the Macapagal-Arroyo administration to fight off allegations that it cheated in the recent May 10 elections. PCIJ.org, @Philippines

Kidnapping cases lowest in 11 years

By Christian V. Esguerra

THE GOVERNMENT'S all-out war against kidnapping for ransom has brought the number of reported kidnapping incidents in Metro to the lowest in the last 11 years, according to Senator Angelo de Guzman of the anti-crime watchdog Citizens Against Crime.

There has been an average of two kidnappings weekly since January, a figure way below the average of one kidnapping every two days during the previous 10 years, she said.

"There has been no kidnapping in the last 72 days and it's a good sign," she said. The decrease in a phone interview.

Arroyo said kidnapping peaked last year when three abductions were staged on a single day in September.

Angelo Reyes, head of the National Anti-Kidnapping Task Force, boasted of the successful operations at press conference during which he presented a policeman accused for kidnapping.

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HUGE ASP-ect a mess. A parade by various groups during a rally to send a message to Congress to hurry and do the canvassing of votes and the proclamation of the president and vice president. JOAN BONDOC

ALL in a day's work. Pro- and anti-administration legislators all do not seem see quite eye to eye with one another. From left, Sen. Tito Sotto, House Speaker Jose de Venecia, Rep. Didagen Dilangalen, Sen. Edgardo Angara huddle around Sen. Rodolfo Biazon Jr.

'Shame list' of absent lawmakers drawn up

By Carlos Conde

SPEAKER Jose de Venecia Jr. has crashed the whip on fraud-conscious congressmen.

For the first time, the House of Representatives yesterday drew up a "shame list" of lawmakers who were absent the day before's joint congressional session to force them into attending by late debates.

"I appeal to our colleagues' sense of duty and patriotism," De Venecia said. "We have a constitutional mandate to canvass the results of presidential and vice presidential elections."

The decision to publish the names of congressmen who did not show up in session was opposed by a motion from Rep. Bienvenido Teves (Lakas, Negros Oriental).

73 absent

Teves on Tuesday pointed out that it was unfair for congressmen who had been consistently attending sessions, to see the names questioned because of absences and tardiness.

He moved to publish the names of absent congressmen, after Rep. Didagen Dilangalen (Bukidnon) questioned the quorum.

A roll call was made and, to the relief of most, there was a quorum.

Based on the list published by the House yesterday, a total of 73 lawmakers were "absent" from Tuesday's session.

De Venecia pleads

The list showed that 202 congressmen were present, of whom 122 voted to allow the Comelec to use votes as official minutes, and thus canvass.

The House has total membership of 225 district and party-list representatives.

A quorum of at least 113 or 50 percent plus 1 is needed for the House to officially transact business.

De Venecia said: "It is important for the House to maintain a quorum always."

Last week, during a recess debate on canvassing rules, Dilangalen also questioned the quorum. There was none, and De Venecia was forced to adjourn for recess.

Dig this: 'No Fear' also brings House down

From page A1

Teves emphatically denied the accusation.

The charge and counter-charge occurred during the eight debates of debates in Congress tonight for lawmakers had delayed the formal canvass of the election results for president and vice president.

The debates may already have stretched the patience of the incumbent Senate, had it held Labor Rep. Manuel "Boy" Zamora (Negros Occ.).

Zamora had offered to do the job of canvassing the ballot boxes because he said he was bored to death.

Missing CoCs

The session was adjourned to an embarrassing note on Tuesday when House officials opened the ballot boxes from Lanao-nao Norte—where opposition presidential candidate Fernando Poe Jr. supposedly won—and found the CoCs missing.

Zamora could explain why they were not there.

Before yesterday officially asked Commission on Elections Chair Benjamin Abalos to "investigate[s] culprits" the board of canvassers of Lanao-nao Norte and explain within two days why the canvassers were missing.

CoCs are summaries of votes used for national candidates in provinces, cities and districts around the country.

Sarmiga del Sur also missing

A further hitch in yesterday's session occurred when House officials opened two ballot boxes and found that the CoC in one of the boxes was also missing.

Administration lawmakers latched on and the missing document was virtually misplaced in the other box.

But the prolonged debates had begun reaching their tolerance limit. Biazon, in short of the joint session.

Reacting to Maliksi[illegible]'s call on lawmakers to expedite the canvassing, Defensor said there was no need for the Palace to remind Congress of its job.

"We know our job in Congress. We know our responsibility in Congress," Defensor said, sounding miffed. "We don't need a reminder from Mr. President Macapagal-Arroyo's spokesperson Ignacio Bunye."

Bunye's remarks [illegible] Tuesday [illegible] said it was not the opposition which suggested that the session be harassed when it seized objections to CoCs involving less than 2,000 votes.

He said that on the past few days, it was the members of the minority [illegible] who would come in early for the session.

As for the tendency of Defensor to raise issues on the floor that would result in lengthy debates, Arthi said that Defensor's questions were significant.

A move by the administration party to speed up the proceedings by [illegible] canvassing the ballot boxes containing the CoCs in the house already connected failed to push through.

The opposition had rejected the move to succeed [illegible].

Rearranging seats

Before the session resumed at 2 p.m., staff members had begun rearranging the seats in the session hall to accommodate both the 22 members-elect and the senators assigned to canvass the tallies, and the lawmakers involved in opening the other ballot boxes.

But that rearrangement was stopped after Biazon announced that the simultaneous canvassing and opening of the ballot boxes would not push through.

He said the arrangement was made but after both cabinated the controversy [illegible] because of the minority did not agree to the proposal.

"Some could be suggested that some of their members objected to the simultaneous canvassing, and therefore we had no choice but to agree go back to the joint canvassing of both tallies all the time," Biazon quipped to joint session," Defensor said.

In separate interviews, both Sotto and Sen. Loren Legarda declared that an agreement had been forged between the majority and the minority for a simultaneous canvassing and opening of CoCs.

In another display of importance over the Congress proceedings, Palace officials took turns yesterday in urging lawmakers not to prolong the country's agony over who is the next [illegible].

Impatience

"We want to see over the impatience of the people to know the truth. Public consensus should prevail among all leaders who are genuinely concerned about the good of our nation," Bunye said in a statement.

He said the "growing sense of impatience" is due to the "unnecessarily and unreasonably, of the legitimacy of the election" should compel Congress to do its job faster and the opposition to [illegible] to "move swiftly."

The watchdog National Citizens' Movement for Free Elections and the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines have said that the elections were, on the whole, credible and there is no evidence of massive cheating to the administration.

Dr. Abril cadiz, Bunye's deputy Ricardo Saludo, pointed out that the lawmakers' role was merely to tally the results and not to question what happened during the voting or the counting in the municipalities level.

This should be issued with the Presidential Election Tribunal composed of Supreme Court Justices, he said.

Renewed warnings

Mr. Macapagal's campaign spokesperson Michael Defensor refused the Palace's call for the lawmakers to step up the pace of the counting to allow the country to move on after a tumultuous election.

Defensor shot down the opposition's claim of railroading the canvassing.

Bunye said the opposition should consider exhausting all legal options after running out of filibuster tactics."

"We welcome any moves that would expedite the congressional canvass, give it a final stamp of legitimacy and quiet down the controversies involved," Bunye said.

Aside from quickening the pace of canvassing, the President's move also removed their warnings against efforts by vested groups to destabilize the government.

"The people are fed up with destabilization and coup rumors. Any moves to grab power will be resisted by the people," Bunye said. — With a report from Cil C. Cabacungan Jr.

Who cheated who? Lawyers join bickerings

From page A1

Zamboanga del Sur, Leyte, Lagna, Catanduva City, Rizal, Isabela and Aurora.

"So who's cheating?" she asked.

Administration and opposition poll watchers should have immediately objected at the precinct level against perceived irregularities.

'National Tally of Shame'

It was what the Municipal camp did in General Santos City and an administration-initiated case is now pending before the Commission on Elections, she said.

Rodriguez unveiled what he called a "national tally of shame," accusing the administration of having cheated from Luzon to Mindanao.

He claimed the list were two million votes due to massive cheating in 25 provinces and cities.

By Rodriguez's reckoning, the total was estimated at 1,400,000 votes in Magnificent.

Disputed places

He said certificates of canvass (COCs) in some provinces and cities were already tampered with and the Bandsyung Pilipinas (formerly Pilipinas 2000) would contest these during the canvass.

The KBP identified the places as Iloilo, Ilocos Eastern, Maguindanao, Basilan, Davao Norte, Davao Occidental, Agusan del Norte, Agusan del Sur, Surigao, Cebu, Bohol, Iloilo, Aklan, Leyte, Bukidnon, Batangas, Pampanga, Davao Sur, Leyte, Bukidnon-Lanao and Lanao.

KBP said it would also challenge COCs from the cities of Las Piñas, Muntinlupa and Quezon and from the absentee voting centers of Hong Kong.

Rodriguez said that in Samar, Basilan, Pasay City, 15,263 votes while Mr. Macapagal garnered 5,316 votes. But in the COCs, she got 16,953 votes and Poe's 1,867.

"They don't count the loads to come out ... In Mindanao alone, 1Mr. Macapagal's will lose by around 800,000 votes in the canvassing and she will be swamped by Fernando Poe votes," she said.

Mr. Macapagal's camp said she won by 1.1 million votes. Poe's backers said he won also by about that margin but that administration agents were robbing him of victory.

Erap wants pass again for Loi, Jinggoy

From page A1

mentor Senate "feuds and frauds" would save embattled Senator Jinggoy's successful bid for the Senate.

There seems to be just a little resistance to the scoring.

Asked about Estrada's seventh request for a pass this year, Special Prosecutor Dennis Villa-Ignacio said: "Perhaps he pursued us, legally speaking, by nature. I think that's all right because he's going to be with the legislature shortly."

Last month, Estrada sought a pass to attend court to the convictions joint session Tanay Estate Campaign—whose he is detained for plunder and [illegible]—to spend time with his [illegible] mother Loreta Ejercito Estrada, who was running S. The request was denied.

Weekly parties?

"With his numerous children, he may have to visit his estate weekly just to spend time with his children," Villa-Ignacio said at the time. If the session were granted, he explained, "it would set a bad precedent."

Estrada, 67, is married to Loi but has openly acknowledged his relationship with Laarni Enriquez and her stepsons Gala Gomez, Lauren Enriquez, Joe Melendez, Pete Ramirez and Pesano Pineda, as well as former flight attendant Rowena Lopez.

Villa-Ignacio doubted yesterday that, as a matter of course, government prosecutors would still object to Estrada's latest plea.

"He will use how his lawyers argue it out on Friday. We will note their arguments before making any comment," he said.

Successful bids

It wasn't always thumbs down for the restless detainee.

Estrada has been granted passes and furloughs before. One occasion was the birthday of his mother Loreta, who died in the arrested home in the Tanay. When she fell ill, he was allowed to see her in the hospital.

Estrada obtained permission to go on a three-day spiritual retreat in the Tanay Resort Hotel in Hindy, and again spent his birthday there just over a week later.

Earlier, Estrada asked the court to allow him to take three days off on the 10th to be in Tacloban City to attend the wedding of his military detention quarters would not flank. The senator has not been involved.

But the sandiganbayan court turned down the request to undergo medical examination at the Makati Medical Center in a San Juan hospital.

Palace goes soft

Private prosecutors in the plunder case have criticized Estrada's latest bid for furloughs and passes and furloughs, charging that Estrada was being given "special treatment."

Members of Pandit/Wanti also said the pressure, on top of reports that convictions obtained fabricated to the evil house intervention[illegible] were without merit. He indicated that Malacañang were "going soft" on Estrada.

Law against minors buying cigarettes enforced

From page A1

penalties within 100 meters from schools, playgrounds, and all youth facilities, and banned cigarette vending machines altogether.

Stringent measures

The stringent measures are in accordance with the implementing rules and regulations (IRR) of the public Act No. 9211, or the Tobacco Regulation Act of 2003, which was signed into law in June last year.

Led by the Department of Trade and Industry and the Department of Health, the top tobacco executives met on tobacco advertisement the IRR three months ago. The new rules limit young smokers' access to tobacco products and stipulate guidelines for the sale of tobacco products, packaging labels and signs to establishments selling cigarettes.

The World Bank earlier reported that 30 percent of children in urban areas smoked, with many of them having their first cigarette between 13 and 15 years old. About 90 percent of adult smokers were also found to have started smoking before they were 18.

Public info

Jessica de Leon, Senate 2020 advocacy coordinator for tobacco control, said the stringent rules would help children more than before, but that the public had not been sufficiently informed.

"People still don't know that there is a ban against smoking by minors, and against smoking in public places. Even until in a place intended for minors like us," she said.

She said police could arrest minors if the tobacco control laws. However, she said, even the Philippine National Police had not briefed its personnel on the IRR.

De Leon said the interagency committee was for using or educating school teachers and local government units (LGUs) first.

There was no need for the LGUs to pass an ordinance to enact the IRR as Makati and Davao cities had done, although this would be helpful, she added.

"Moral ordinance ... is a matter of political will and only a structure for implementing the law," De Leon explained.

Clear signs

The IRR mandates all establishments selling tobacco products to post "clear and conspicuous" signs that say: "It is unlawful for tobacco products to be sold to minors below 18 years of age." Dr. Tonio Gallo declines to accept purchase by minors of tobacco products is unlawful.

Those caught selling to or buying tobacco products from minors would be fined at least P5,000 or jailed for not more than 30 days for the first offense.

The same penalty, plus the revocation of the permit to operate or business license by an establishment, will apply for succeeding offenses.

Lung cancer

Section 2, Rule 2 of the IRR says: "It shall not be a defense for the person selling, distributing, or purchasing cigarettes or any tobacco products that he/she did not know or was not aware of the real age of the minor to whom said cigarettes or tobacco products were sold, distributed, or from whom they were purchased or like cases may be."

Tobacco consumption [unclear] closes an coward by the law, De Leon said. She also advised against allowing children to run errands selling tobacco products, as this is a still was a violation.

About 40 percent of Filipinos smoke. Lung cancer has been identified as among the most common kinds of cancer in the Philippines.

18 years after Cory, nuns give GMA sanctuary

By Bernadette A. Parra
[illegible]

CEBU CITY—Having her "spiritual retreat" at the Carmelite Monastery here, President Macapagal-Arroyo stayed in a room that was prepared for her once used by former President Corazon Aquino. This was in February 1986, just before the start of People Power I, when the Aquinos sought refuge in the convent.

"I am staying in the room that was originally prepared for former President Aquino. The shower was easy to use, more because it was a corner room with two windows so she was ventilated," Mr. Macapagal told reporters during an informal dinner chat to the Press Club Cebu (CCP) Board on Monday night.

Ms Aquino and daughter Kris were moved to the adjacent room which had one window.

In contrast, Mr. Macapagal found her room because "it overlooked the [nuns' garden]," and could her appreciate the peace and solitude of convent life.

The President flew to Cebu on Sunday night to rest and pray at the Carmelite Monastery in Barangay Mabolo. Her two-day stay came 18 years after "God's chosen event" served as a protection of Ms Aquino who sought sanctuary in the convent amid a time of political calvinism.

Ms Aquino, who was then running for president against former strongman Ferdinand Marcos, won in Cebu City in February 1986 to lead a peaceful rally. When former defense secretary Juan Ponce Enrile and deputy chief of staff Fidel Ramos announced their defection, the opposition group here feared for her safety. Close friend Sister Cornee, wife of Cebu City Rep. Antonio Cuenco, immediately arranged for Ms Aquino and her daughter Kris to stay at the Carmelite Monastery.

Not everyone can enter the monastery of contemplative nuns because the grounds are considered part of the "papal enclosure," for they require the permission of the Holy Father, although exemptions are granted to bishops or heads of state.

The contemplative nuns again opened their doors for a head of state, who, this time, wanted time to pray amid fiery debates in Congress regarding the canvassing of votes for president and vice president.

Gregg Bernardo, ILS media bureau chief who was with the President, pointed out that Mr. Macapagal's reason for visiting the monastery is different from Ms Aquino's. "The only similarity is that they both needed a place of solace," he said.

But prayer in the monastery was disturbed, as members of the Presidential Security Group (PSG) were all over the compound, securing the place.

The faithful who attended the 5 a.m. Mass on Tuesday couldn't help but notice the PSG in full-gear clothes stationed in every nook and cranny as well as the entrance of the parking lot.

Inauguration invitations out with canvassing still to start

By Gil Cabacungan Jr. and Jerome Aning

MALACAÑANG has sent out the formal invitations to foreign ambassadors and consulates in Manila for the inauguration of the country's next president.

The invitation contains a date—June 30—that has left the name and place blank.

In a radio interview, deputy presidential spokesperson Ricardo Saludo said the department of foreign affairs had to send out the invitations early to give each economy time to prepare for the event as well as to decide who to send.

"The invitation does not say who will be inaugurated as president because that is up to Congress," said Saludo. He said the other details would be sent later.

A top DFA official yesterday confirmed that this was not in any way controversial.

"We have to do this early. The procedure is normal," the official who declined to be named said. The invitations were sent in a form of a note verbale last Monday. It was circulated to various foreign embassies and consulates by the DFA's office of protocol.

Saludo said the venue of the inauguration ceremony was also left out because that decision would be left to the next president.

By tradition, the inauguration of the president and vice president is held at the Quirino Grandstand in Manila. This was broken by President Joseph Estrada, who took his oath of office at the Barasoain Church in Malolos City, Bulacan, in 1998.

There has been talk that the event could be held in Cebu or Iloilo. Michael Defensor, political spokesperson of President Macapagal-Arroyo, hinted that the might hold the event in [illegible] cities.

THE DAILY GOSPEL

Thursday, June 3, 2004
9th Week in Ordinary Time

1st Reading: 1 Tim 1:1-7
Gospel: Mk 12:28-34

A teacher of the Law had been listening to this discussion and admired how Jesus answered them. So he came up and asked him, "Which commandment is the first of all?"

Jesus answered, "The first is: Hear, Israel! The Lord, our God, is One Lord; and you shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength. And after this comes another one: this shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these ones."

The teacher of the Law said to him, "Well spoken, Master...you are right when you say that he is one and there is no other. To love him with all our heart, with all our understanding and with all our strength, and to love our neighbor as ourselves is more important than any burnt offering or sacrifice."

Jesus approved this answer and said, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." But after that, no one dared to ask him any more questions.

Commentary:

A young man went to a rabbi and said, "I know that we are commanded to love God with all our heart, all our soul, all our mind, all our strength. But I know that my heart and soul and mind and strength have had years to divide. Do how can I love God?" After a pause the rabbi replied, "If you love you will find better to find with the best you can."

I know a woman who treasures a wonderful note Pope her engraved son. The father of the Prodigal Son would have done the same. Love is like that. It forgives, and never thinks, good people do good things and bad people do bad things, who it is called. Indeed, it can also [illegible] people can do good things and good people can do bad things. That is what makes it an extraordinary adventure rather than a project. The wonder of the Gospel put it, is "to get a true understanding of God loving."

CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE OF THE PHILIPPINES

THE CONDUCT OF THE MAY 10, 2004 NATIONAL ELECTIONS

Reports coming from our bishops show that the May 10, 2004 National Elections were generally peaceful.

The personal responses of the bishops to my questionnaire also show that there were some instances of cheating and violations of election laws by political parties in their areas but these did not affect the voting in general. There were few exceptions, of course.

If there were reports of cheating locally or regionally, the bishops cannot say that there was a national conspiracy to engage in massive cheating.

For this reason, we urge our lawmakers to speed up peacefully the national canvassing of votes. We also urge complainants to go to the proper courts. Our people expect the losers to accept defeat magnanimously, and the winners to welcome victory in humility.

For the Catholic Bishop's Conference of the Philippines:

+FERNANDO R. CAPALLA, DD
Archbishop of Davao
President, Catholic Bishop's
of the Philippines
01 June 2004

GENERAL SECRETARIAT: 470 General Luna St., Intramuros, 1002 Manila
*P.O. BOX 3601, 1076 Manila, Philippines *FAX (632) 527-4063 *TELS. 527-4054; 527-4138
*http://www.cbcp.net *cbcp_secretariat@yahoo.com

PAID ADVERTISEMENT

The WORLD

Editor Lorenzo B. Gozo

Saudi forces step up hunt for militants

RIYADH, Saudi Arabia—Saudi forces fought a gun battle with militants on Tuesday, stepping up a nationwide hunt after a suspected al-Qaida attack on the world's biggest oil exporter at the weekend.

US Secretary of State Colin Powell said he was confident Saudi Arabia could provide assurances of supplies, but said market jitters made oil futures surged above $42 a barrel. The highest price since trading in early futures began 21 years ago.

The shootout occurred near the kingdom's second city of Tabuk, close to the Jordan border, and was reported to the shooting and hostage-taking rampage in the eastern city of Khobar at the weekend. The second major attack on the Saudi oil industry in a month.

Twenty-two people were killed in the attack. Five of them Westerners and other foreigners.

"I have confidence in the ability of the Saudi Arabians to continue to provide a secure flow of oil product," Powell said in parties in Washington.

Powell said he expected Saudi Arabia to do more to combat militants through fighter jets terrorism and border controls, more intelligence sharing and greater efforts to halt financing.

"They have been doing a good deal to some months and I would expect them to do more," he said.

Washington has in part to blame in how Saudi Arabia because of the violence and other Western governments have told their nationals to avoid all but essential travel to the kingdom, which has large numbers of Westerners in its workforce.

Before Tuesday's shootout, Saudi forces had snatched village members for three militants who escaped after the Khobar attack, setting up checkpoints and vowed to root the kingdom.

King Fahd and other senior members of the royal family, whose lives have been battling by more than a year to stamp out attacks by Saudi Osama bin Laden's al-Qaida, have vowed to beat the militants.

Saudi Arabia says it will keep oil supplies flowing and has repeated that an Opec meeting in Beirut later this week should take further steps to help some potential high oil prices that are threatening global economic growth.

Many foreigners living in Saudi Arabia said the Khobar bloodbath could have been averted if security had been tighter. Reuters

Freeze eyed on assets of terror groups

WASHINGTON—The United States and Saudi Arabia plan to block the assets of more affiliates of the Saudi charity Al-Haramain as part of the broader war on Osama bin Laden's al-Qaida network, US officials said on Tuesday.

US and Saudi officials are to announce their decision in Washington on Wednesday after visiting in January they were moving to block assets of Al-Haramain's Saudi branches in Afghanistan, Kenya, Tanzania and Pakistan.

"It's more affiliates of Al-Haramain," a US official said of the announcement due at 10 a.m. news conference at the Saudi Embassy in Washington.

It would follow weekend attacks in which four suspected al-Qaida gunmen killed 22 people in a hostage-taking and shooting spree in the eastern Saudi city of Khobar—the second strike in a month in the Saudi oil industry.

Washington said the Al-Haramain affiliates to its list of people or groups believed to have committed, threatened or supported terrorism.

That required US banks to freeze their assets and bring the assets of those listed. The US and Saudi officials were expected to call for the affiliates to be added to a similar UN list, triggering a global crackdown.

One US official said the move followed evidence of long-standing donations that the affiliates may be funneling money to al-Qaida, blamed for the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks on the United States, and others who sponsor "terrorism."

Another US official defined the link to al-Qaida more broadly, saying the group may have "founded money to entities that have operations with people linked to al-Qaida."

The Saudi Embassy, which said it would "announce a major development in the war on terrorism," declined to comment. It has sought to publicize its efforts to combat al-Qaida. Reuters

POLICE stop vehicles at a check point near a Saudi Oil refinery in Jubail, Saudi Arabia. The recent terror attacks on oil-related targets in exacerbated concerns about oil prices and security in Saudi oil installations. AP

US bares al-Qaida nuclear bomb plot

WASHINGTON—American Joe Biden proposed detonating an improvised nuclear bomb in the United States but said Osama bin Laden was deterred because he could do it and was late on a mission to blow up apartment buildings instead, the US justice department said on Tuesday.

The department released the newly declassified information on Padilla as a man who the US Supreme Court is preparing to rule on whether he and other have been citizens can be held indefinitely in US military jails without the traditional protections of the US legal system.

Padilla, a man of plotting is set of a so-called "dirty bomb" is a former Chicago gang member and convert to Islam. He has not been charged with any crime but has been held in a military prison in South Carolina for almost two years.

In a sworn confession, Deputy Attorney General James Comey said he would describe as a conclusion the release of the information now, when the Supreme Court is due to rule by the end of June on whether Padilla can.

He acknowledged in response the Padilla information was released because of criticism of detention Donald John Ashcroft for last week's argue warning that al-Qaida plans to attack against the United States in the next few months.

"We have decided to release this information to help people understand why we are doing what we're doing in the war on terror and to help people understand the nature of the threat we face," Comey said.

The information was provided in a letter written by Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz to Comey.

The letter said al-Qaeda figure Mohammed Atef directed Padilla in July or August 2001 to take part with "no specifics to blow up apartment buildings in the United States filled with gas," and Padilla accepted the task.

But the operation was "apparently abandoned" because Padilla could not get along with another al-Qaida operative with whom he was assigned to work and said he couldn't act on the operation alone, the letter stated.

Comey said the other person on that operation was supposed to be Adnan Shukrijumah, one of seven people named by Ashcroft last week as wanted for questioning by the FBI.

The letter said Padilla stated that he met another accomplice surrounded senior al-Qaida figure Abu Zubaydah "with an operation in which they would travel to the United States to detonate a nuclear bomb they learned to make or buy in Russia."

The letter said Zubaydah was skeptical of the idea, but sent them to Pakistan to meet with another key al-Qaida leader, Khalid Sheikh Mohammad, who has been described by the United States as the mastermind of the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks.

An unidentified senior al-Qaida detainee has said Zubaydah thought a so-called "dirty bomb"— explosives wrapped in radioactive—"much more feasible," according to the letter.

But Mohammad was "very skeptical" about the dirty bomb plot and supported a return to the spectacular building operation, with strikes in New York, although Florida and Washington, D.C., were discussed as possible targets, too.

Mohammad asked Padilla to apply explosives training he received in Afghanistan "to destroy an entire building in the around United States by filling aluminum plates on the side of a room holding the pillars of the building, so that jet fuel would absorb all the shock of the explosives, filling the room with exploding gas, and then setting a detonator to go off in 24 hours," the letter stated. Reuters

Study: Estimate of chemical exposure in Gulf War flawed

WASHINGTON—The Pentagon's estimate that more than 100,000 US troops were exposed to chemical agents released by bombings and demolition of Iraqi munitions depots in the 1990-1991 Gulf War was flawed and may have resulted in "large underestimations," a congressional audit agency concluded Tuesday.

The General Accounting Office also challenged the conclusion of the Department of Defense (DOD) and the Veterans Affairs Department (VA) that there was no correlation between exposures and health problems in the area at the time.

In a separate report, it faulted the Veterans Administration for not doing follow-up analyses of research findings on Gulf War illnesses to determine whether there are gaps or promising areas for future research.

But the Pentagon estimated in 2000 that 101,752 troops were potentially exposed to the chemical agents released in bombings and demolitions of Iraqi munitions dumps during and immediately after the 1991 Gulf War.

The estimates were based on computer models that projected the size and path of the plumes of poison gas dispersed, which were then superimposed on the known locations of military units in the area at the time.

But the GAO found that the assumptions made in the computer models about the quantity and purity of the chemical agents "were inaccurate because they were uncertain, incomplete and were calculated."

The Pentagon's height used in the modeling were underestimated and so were the hazard zones," it said.

Field tests performed after the war did not realistically simulate the actual conditions of bombings or demolitions, the GAO said.

Models developed by the Pentagon and the CIA "showed wide divergencies as to plume size and path," the GAO said.

Moreover, the GAO said the evaluations of the defense department and the VA failed to "give any consideration to the possibility that [chemical agents] could be classified as exposed under the non-DOD model." AP

Pakistan bombers used 10 kg of explosives

KARACHI—Ten kilograms of explosives were used in the suspected suicide attack inside a Shiite Muslim mosque that killed 20 people in the Pakistani port city of Karachi, investigators said Wednesday.

"Ten kilograms of explosives and shell of a rocket believed to be that of a mortar bomber, and will carry out [the] hate [Sunni] Shiite [extremist] sectarian police investigators said.

"A preliminary examination of the blast site has suggested some 10 kilograms of composite explosives was used," the terrorist police said.

Some 20 people were killed and 28 injured when an explosion ripped through the Ali Raza mosque late Monday, a day after the assassination of provincial police Shiite leader Maulvi Nisar-uddin Shairazi in the same area.

No one has claimed responsibility for the bombing, but police suspect it was carried out by a suicide bomber in revenge for Shairazi's killing.

On July 4 in the Karachi, a suicide bombing killed 23 people in the Shiite Muslim mosque.

The three incidents have triggered massive outrage that has resulted in at least five people being killed, as well as crackdown hundreds of and protesters, prompting to in the country's largest city.

Police said they were examining whether there were any links between the three incidents. "There is a strong possibility that the murder of Shairazi could be the work of [the] suicide bomber who carried out the attack on the Ali Raza mosque could be in retaliation to Shairazi's murder," a police spokesman said.

The city of 14 million people remains tense and authorities have intensified security in places of worship with heavy deployments of paramilitary troops.

After Monday's attack, President Pervez Musharraf said he would take major steps to deal with the mounting violence but did not spell out what he had in mind.

Officials close to Musharraf said sweeping administrative changes were expected in Karachi, capital of southern Sindh province. AFP

Victims of Tiananmen massacre still seek redress

BEIJING—Fifteen years after troops broke the tanks crushed Chinese pro-democracy movement cowed on Beijing's Tiananmen Square, some relatives and families of the dead are still seeking redress.

For Ling Zifan, a 67-year-old retired professor, the anniversary of her teenage son's death is another source to press China's new generation of leaders to reverse the official verdict on the protests and come clean about those who disappeared.

"Today, as we do every anniversary to bother us up, my hands continue to tremble and bleed," she wrote on behalf of the Tiananmen Mothers advocacy group in a letter sent to reporters in Beijing. "We should remember that the 4th June is a day of hatefulness, inhumanity and hypocrisy.

"It reminds a system in which freedom and democracy are smothered, in which any spirit of civilization must be eradicated, guided by a regime which any challenge this system must be ruthlessly suppressed."

The Tiananmen Mothers demanded that China's current leadership, led by President Hu Jintao and Premier Wen Jiabao who are known to have been "most of the people" image, recognize the military's suppression as a crime against humanity.

"They should use the kind of courage that can face the crimes of history with it as repentance," wrote Ding, who rights group say is under house arrest to prevent her from meeting journalists or publicly commemorating the June 4 anniversary.

She replaced Ding Zilin as Tiananmen Mothers chief in November 2002 and as state president late year. Jiang had succeeded Deng Xiaoping, who ordered the deadly clash in 1989 to opposing the measures.

The Tiananmen Mothers recorded the names of 202 people killed during the massacre, including Chang Xuening, who died at the front of a flagpole flying the Chinese flag at the entrance of the square, and Wu Guoding, who appeared in the front holding wounds.

Premier Wen in March ruled out an appraisal of the 1989 protests, citing the need for stability.

But the authorities have openly changed their description of the protests from a "counter-revolutionary rebellion" to a "political disturbance," occasionally playing down its significance in the hope that people would begin about it. Reuters

NEW IRAQI LEADERS

Iraq's new interim government President Ghazi Al-Yawer speaks during a ceremony in Baghdad Tuesday. Iraqi leaders can place caring deal with the United States and United Nations on a president and government to lead the country out of occupation. AP/WIDE

Robots could save Hubble telescope—Nasa

ORLANDO—The Hubble Space Telescope, which once appeared doomed, could be rescued by robots, Nasa's chief told the science's anniversary Tuesday.

Nasa administrator Sean O'Keefe said the space agency is making proposals for robots to service the 14-year-old telescope, without human pilots, from space how named it more than a call following.

The audience of about 1,000 astronomers erupted into applause. The American Astronomical Society, which is hosting the meeting, has lobbied to keep the Hubble telescope running.

So have astronauts, congressmen and thousands of citizens.

Without repair work, Nasa estimates Hubble will stop working observations by 2007 or 2008, when its batteries are expected to fail. O'Keefe said the goal would be to service the big space observatory by the end of 2007.

Space-walking astronauts were supposed to install new batteries and other gear on Hubble in 2006. But after the shuttle Columbia broke apart on reentry because of safety concerns after the loss of seven astronauts in the Columbia space shuttle's accident last year.

Key crews ready to pull the plug on Hubble. But there are a huge concern over the loss of the telescope responsible for the most dramatic and colorful pictures from space. AP

WINDY DAY
US President George W. Bush negotiates his umbrella in the wind during a rainstorm after stepping off Marine One at Andrews Air Force Base. The president boarded Air Force One and departed for Colorado. AP/File

Probe sought anew on Iraqi contracts

WASHINGTON — A newly unearthed Pentagon e-mail about Halliburton contracts in Iraq on Tuesday prompted fresh calls in Congress for probes into whether Vice President Dick Cheney helped his old firm get the deals.

The e-mail, reported by Time magazine, provided "clear evidence" of a relationship between Cheney and multibillion-dollar contracts Halliburton has received for rebuilding Iraq, Rep. Patrick Leahy said.

"It totally contradicts the vice president's previous assertions of having no contact" with federal officials about Halliburton's Iraq deals, Leahy, a Vermont Democrat, said in a conference call set up by John Kerry's presidential campaign.

"It would be irresponsible not to hold hearings."

The March 2003 Pentagon e-mail cites review of a no-bid Halliburton contract to rebuild Iraq's oil industry was "coordinated" with Cheney's office.

Cheney was chief executive officer of the oilfield services giant from 1996 until he joined George W. Bush's presidential ticket in 2000.

New Jersey's Sen. Frank Lautenberg, another Democrat, urged the chair of the Senate government affairs committee, Republican Sen. Susan Collins, to subpoena e-mails and any other evidence of contacts between the US Army Corps of Engineers and Cheney's office on Halliburton's Iraq contracts.

"The sentiment that the Vice President's office was involved in the awarding of this contract ... makes the need for an investigation more critical," Lautenberg wrote to Collins.

But Collins said in a statement that there were already several probes of Halliburton going on — by the General Accounting Office, defense auditors and the Pentagon inspector general, to a probe by her committee was unneeded, she said.

Cheney's office denied ever the weekend that it had any role in the Halliburton contracts, and a senior adviser to the Bush-Cheney campaign, Mary Matalin, repeated this on Tuesday.

"The vice President had no operational involvement with letting of any contracts," she said on NBC's "Today" show.

On the other side of Capitol Hill, Rep. Henry Waxman, a California Democrat, wrote to Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld suggesting he also helped steer Iraq oil work to Halliburton.

Waxman said the General Accounting Office, the audit arm of Congress, told him the oil work should have been released competitively.

The Army Gaser Bin, Waxman said the GAO had told him. But he wrote Rumsfeld, "your office concealed the Army said directed Army officials to issue the task order to Halliburton."

Lautenberg, Waxman and several other Democrats have called for months for hearings into the role of US government deals involving Halliburton, the biggest contractor in Iraq.

U.S. Army Training for Iraqi and Kuwaiti Security Forces Contract

This is to certify that residence as a civilian assigned to

New Zealand

Iran admits importing nuclear equipment

VIENNA (Austria) — U.S. officials, Iran has acknowledged importing parts for advanced centrifuges that can be used to make uranium, the UN atomic monitoring agency said in a confidential report obtained by The Associated Press.

The report by the head of the UN atomic watchdog agency confirmed Iran could secretly nuclear experiments but said questions remained about nearly two decades of covert activities first revealed nearly two years ago.

The dossier was issued for the June 14 meeting of the IAEA 35-nation board of governors that has rewarded for most Iran's case about what to do about what the United States and its allies see is a weapons program.

Tehran has insisted in one way or another nuclear weapons, although the process can also be used to generate power, depending on the degree of enrichment.

In an interview with The Associated Press before the report was leaked Tuesday, US Undersecretary of State John R. Bolton accused Tehran of engaging in "denial and deception."

"We are convinced that they are pursuing a clandestine program to acquire nuclear weapons," he said.

Bolton, who was at a centers conference of the US-founded Problem, Israeli's Institute to stop the spread of weapons of mass destruction, said Washington was determined to have Tehran current to the UN Security Council.

While the report did not appear critical enough of Iran to establish strong support at the IAEA board meeting for such a move, it also was far from the clean bill of health Tehran had hoped for in ending a case that the books should be closed on its nuclear activities.

Mohamed ElBaradei, the IAEA chief, said earlier Tuesday his agency had not found proof to date of a concrete link between Iran's nuclear activities and its military program, but "it was premature to make a judgment."

Iran has rejected the IS allegations, saying its nuclear program is geared only toward generating electricity.

Concerns over Iran's nuclear program mounted after IAEA inspectors found traces of highly enriched uranium at two Iranian sites. Iran said the uranium was already on equipment imported from abroad. AP

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OPINION

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Nothing has changed

THERE'S no denying the tears shed for Filipino workers overseas who lose their lives in the course of eking out a living for the sustenance of the families they left at home. There is a particular poignancy in their drawing their last breath in a foreign land (no matter how long they have toiled there), away from their loved ones' embrace and everything they held dear. It is a pro-

EDITORIAL found anguish for their families to carry particularly because these families also have to endure the long wait for the repatriation of the bodies. Take it from those who have survived such a wait; observe (rather like a voyeur) the even deeper grief that descends at night of the lost bearing the mortal remains.

But there will be many more tears shed for Filipino seafarers overseas, of that we can be certain. The Philippines' being a regular supplier (both lawful and not) of labor to practically all points on the planet has virtually guaranteed on many recurring, as when suspected Islamic extremists attacked a residential compound of mostly Western expatriates in the oil city of Al-Khobar in Saudi Arabia last Saturday. The attack, which included the taking of hostages and a subsequent rescue by Saudi commandos, resulted in a death toll of 22 civilians, among them three Filipinos.

Three men, at once varying but strikingly similar in circumstances: Mariano Cabanag, a cook; Feliciano Dizon, an accountant; Joelly Gray, a driver. All employed in the pursuit of happiness, not necessarily their own, undoubtedly that of their families. Cabanag, the loving son building a family home where once there was a shack of cogon, sawali and bamboo; Dizon, the dutiful brother shouldering the entire cost of his sibling's ramification; Gray, the anxious father bent on seeing all his children complete their studies before coming home for good.

There lives, now snuffed out, but the story of our lives.

The Department of Foreign Affairs estimates about 840,000 Filipinos working in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia alone. Of these workers, these long-distance runners, it is not known how many are professionals, and how many are domestics. What is certain is that close to a million households in the Philippines are dependent on the sweat of their brow (and the unthinkable depths of their loneliness), households that are in close danger of penury on home grounds if these workers succumb to the close danger of loss of life or limb on the desert sands.

This is the way it goes in this "strong republic" that likes to boast of creating millions of jobs for Filipinos—and yet, by its refusal to halt the deployment of workers to the suddenly vulnerable kingdom despite the terror attack described as the deadliest in a year, it forced to acknowledge its own vulnerability (think jobs, think oil). The vulnerability is so extreme that last month, it took the longest time to decide whether to pull out Filipino workers from Iraq despite the Iraqi insurgents' attack on Camp Anaconda: the workers—hungry, terrified, dying to go home—had to care about for the opportunity to fly back on their own steam.

For all the upheavals that have flared, sputtered, flared and sputtered yet again, this much is clear: The labor policy instituted by the late strongman Ferdinand Marcos still keeps the economy—and the top economic perpetrating to begin a six-year term—afloat.

We must say it again and again, in case the perils of this labor policy are not yet clear.

Girls like Sarah Balabagan take their birth wounds to work in the Middle East, and to the process of escaping rape, grab their employers dead. If they're lucky, they face the death sentence by the skin of their teeth and manage to return. Others also get sent home, if not lifeless in a box, then silver on a wheelchair, hands bound and spirit unhinged.

Men and women leave their families to lend their skill and strength to the most dangerous places (including the US prison at Guantanamo Bay): the separate lives claim heavy social costs in terms of frayed relationships and wayward children. (And also drug addiction, which, the last time we looked, has conquered much of the towns in the countryside.)

"When I awoke, the dinosaur was still there," wrote the Latin American Augusto Monterroso in his famous one-line story.

In our time and place, nothing has changed. And there will be other tears for weeping for Filipino workers overseas.

Manual count? Never again

VIEWPOINT

Juan L. Mercado

Filipinos homage. We tautologize again the certainty of the baby in "Mission Impossible."

"Manual Count? Never Again!" That's the title of Parish Pastoral Council for Responsible Voting source manager Ralph Daza's diary. With 20 years of United Nations experience in Asia and Africa, he and his wife Gina help church and non-government people participate in good governance efforts. Their election-day account provides insights into a hamstrung electoral system, and hints at hopeful effective governance.

Transcript maps hell at 3 p.m. vs. signal end of voting. By this stretch, pressure was mounting for completion of garbled lists for to complain over failure to vote."

"My wife is on the list but I am not," an irate voter complains. "We've voted together since 2001." "The Parish Pastoral Council for Responsible Voting received dozens of similar reports."

Counting has started in all 61 precincts by 4 p.m. Five board tally sheets taped on a long blackboard cover a whole wall. After posting dozen sticks for four votes, tally man cross out with a slash for five.

"Using the stick symbol was taught to me in kindergarten. Since then, I have learned more sophisticated and accurate ways of counting. But not Comelec."

The Comelec is slow by 6 p.m. every body—from election inspectors, party watchers to volunteers—had "some degree of tiredness." They have been here since 6 a.m. Or a. That's 12 hours.

A road worker Mateo Pangasian for vice-president has only 7 votes. Another candidate 8. 4 votes seem invalid. "Ekspresado"? Solid for Orlando Mercado. For Bayan Muna, one scribbled "Bayad Muna." Said "Virbas Pasa" does not count, invalid.

Volunteers help jot down numbers. "To our amazement, a young volunteer counted the votes by calling out the assigned number of candidates. In manual count, he counts to 40 senatorial candidates, 11 party-list and 22 councilors. Impressive."

Half the precincts are done by 11:30 p.m. Thumb-marking seven copies of election returns takes arduous fingertip stress for 300 to 500 voters per precinct.

A poll clerk falls asleep while counting. He keeps losing the winning line. "Wa! Up, up," shouts the equally exhausted chair. "A little more. That's it."

Simple arithmetic says setting Pajero and add the chair to comfy Pangasi Rice Corn services are made. It takes another hour.

Dawn of May 11, exhausted volunteers bring the sixth copy of election returns to National boardgunners. Inches are signed Visual or as. Election 05 take home separate. It's only by 7 a.m. that the last returns are in.

"Marking straight for 24 hours completed the accuracy and efficiency of counting," Daza says. "This should be the last and final manual counting of votes."

So, what happens to once this organized chaos? Buenta is urging pressed on former Commissioner Luz Rimban Tabasaga and Comelec's "Gang of Four." They ignored the film. Gen Modernization Law limited, they ran a computerized vote-counting program that the Supreme Court declared.

But 26 House Junior committee members share this gold. They shelved Committee Report No. 1099 which deemed their intelligence to be "illegal, immoral and unethical." They voted to continue their own ways by refusing to explain their votes.

"There's a lack of political will to push ahead with the long overdue modernization," Dr. Ronald Mendoza, German administrator on Asian affairs, writes. Senior politicians are "content with the status quo, which provides them with the ability to handle opportunities of manipulation via modernize to meaningfully advance elections."

Legacy of smallness

THERE'S THE RUB

Conrado de Quiros

A CONTINUE of readers errors in object to the phrase, "toilet cleaners of the world," which I've used to depict the kind people we have in some today. This was in connection with my series of editorial extolling the Filipino seamen who have represented their country so many times.

One of the letter-writers was particularly irate, saying the choice to issue the country and work abroad was perfectly valid and, indeed, completely understood. What made the saying abroad, particularly in the United States, attractive, he said, was that it offered choices, something that was becoming less and less possible in the country. Unless the country can offer a better deal, he said, why should one not want to go for greener pastures, or be criticized for it?

Well, my apologies for offending sensibilities. One reminder that I used the phrase "toilet cleaners of the world" in reference to the choices made by Filipino doctors, nurses and others who topped the medical board exams only to accept a job as caretaker in a hospital in New York. Neither does not belong to the category of Filipinos whom Barry Gutierrez, the OIC administrator of the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration and proposes to go back to the working job, described as people who chose classes between starvation and survival. He belongs to the category of Filipinos who made choices between, as Gutierrez himself points, commuting on work and working on ICU. Doing a simple job serving the people and earning dollars while staying, well, that's where the "toilet cleaners of the world," to quote Gutierrez, is.

The morning on ICU and earning almighty dollars do not make change it pass with the price of accepting a job for which one's capabilities, as Jacinto's case dramatically shows, taken importantly, it goes with the price of acquiring the country of one's talents. I said in previous columns that host underscored the decision of countries like Jamaica, who has Brazilian doctors, an island God and government forgot, to get as much as he can wherever he can. But while I can understand it, I cannot stand it. His decision, as those of Filipino doctors, nurses, architects, engineers, lawyers, musicians, lawyers—never mind politicians—does not just represent a brain drain, it represents a veritable brain hemorrhage. Personal gain does not always represent national gain. The one often contradicts the other. It does so in this case.

That is what makes Gutierrez's and company's decision so sick, somewhat haunting that they themselves little regard it as so. Not that it is blithely dismissed, as another letter-writer suggested, as another form of "brain drain" that critics like myself have to learn to live with, who can afford it," or are well-off but still who opt in some home to, or remain in, this country are well-off. Mendiola, or someone some, however you want to put it, is not the monopoly or prerogative of the rich. It is the right or condition of everyone.

But quite apart from this, I have used the hyperbole, "toilet cleaners of the world," to highlight another point. That is the sharp depreciation of this country's ambition, aspirations, or desire for achievement, call it what you will. It is not only the pros that is plunging to an all-time low, it is also this country's self-respect.

I remember that Nick Joaquin once wrote of us every luminating the Filipino's "legacy of smallness." A legacy that made us settle for mediocrity what we were capable of greatness, that made us accept being populist when we could become giants. At the same time Nick wrote this, which was in the 1960s, the country was still in pretty good shape, despite Marcos' initial depredations. Only a decade before, during the height of import substitution, the country was destined second only to Japan in economic potential. It was supposed to work the same miracle

Tired people just want canvass finished

AFTER SIXTY Presidents Franklin Delano recommended a compromise, even if we provide reactions of a president is made before June 30, Sen. Agustin Pimentel opined that order such a measure. Delay, who returns in office next, as he himself put it, "should not [if votes come] along as challenge do," could take away for the new vice president could be considered ahead of the presidents.

To begin with, the law does not allow a partial canvass; the actually-elected vice president is found in the same enrollment of canvass as that for the president. Then, too, Pimentel does not seem to take into account the terrible impression that's how and could be created if a failure to proclaim the president. I have found that because we complaining the foreign investors who had expressed serious cry in investing here before the elections are now hedging due to the political instability caused by a possible delay in the proclamation. Foreign investors cannot fail to note the constant bickering between Malacañang and the Commission on Elections, which supposedly is an "independent" body. Even the stock market has been affected by the uncertainty.

The instability is however big and small businessmen. A friend, Dan B. Tanseco, a hard worker who used his life savings from seven years of working in Europe and the middle East to put up a beauty salon in Makati, recently told me that he has no clear idea how he can stay afloat over the past three months. Sen. who takes pains to keep in step with fluctuating trends in Europe the country stranded in fear and indecision. Pimentel, worst for his and who depend on their very livelihood business like the ones fearing because of the political instability that's sapping the energies of citizens.

Reports say the opposition is trying to rally people to the streets to protest the alleged fraudulent fraud, but the fact is that most of them are just tired of it all. They just want to see the canvass by Congress finished and the winners proclaimed, so that they can go on with their lives and make enough for their families. Some eg Impose Republican extreme, down on the ground.

Thus, they would condemn as a delaying move the opposition's plan to question 25 COCs and pray for their exclusion by going back to the project various and meaningful documents of votes, claims Mucupagal Senator Lacson. Bautista Macalintal, who carried out a "fishing expedition," officials that examining the printed 14 cases of 25 COCs would take three years, meaning, "no-no."

* * *

The opposition's latest move to challenge before the Supreme Court the constitutionality of the joint committee that was overwhelmingly approved by Congress will be regarded as another delaying tactic. I said that SP can't support it, the public flays Bautista Angeles Candido, but, for Angara's sense, what is nothing these technical the courts, that I expect the Court to throw it out since it wouldn't want to interfere with a co-equal branch, despite the overall self-delay the canvass.

* * *

Senator Sen. Francis Escudero, 2SP spokesperson, wrote to say that necessary to this column's assertion, that the compromise the opposition proposed were not meant to delay the proclamation of the winner but to provide safeguards, "given the repeated complaints of the joint committee, "the said that while it's true that the joint committee canvass has been used in congressional canvass for a long time, its composition was based on "congressional reasons" for all the candidates, especially in closely contested elections such as this one. He urged representatives, they mean "equal persons and among all presidential candidates" and not proportionate to the majority and minority in Congress, and that this principle was very much in operation for the 1992 canvassing by Congress. He also stressed that the opposition Senate is sensitive only about 10 percent of the COCs, or 15 to 20 COCs. Escudero said that he is not defending the canvass before June 30, of course he pursues to let the process to be fair, efficient, expeditious and transparent."

* * *

As I wrote earlier, indeed Senator President Sergio Gonzales to last accommodated the various presidential candidates in 1992 by allowing them to nominate their representatives to the Joint committee. This may no longer is closely observed by the 1998 canvassing. But if we were to go by Escudero's argument and adopt the 1992 arrangement today, the nominees of each party-senatorial ticket would be the majority senatorial candidate, with the 11th senator from the party list. But this system is also being followed in the 2004 canvassing, though not so formally.

Thus, the opposition would be entitled to six of the 11-member Senate panel, and a number of composition those members, including the canvassing Sen. Hidajat Bilangkalan, as an alternate to the Senate panel as well as in the House panel. Rep. Raul Gonzalez, Liberal for Public Information Secretary Alfonso Ongkiko, who have proven their versatility during the long deliberations on the rules of canvass, obviously can hold their own in both panels. In addition, the so-called "lawyers" will be examining the COCs with the joint committee and offering their opinions orally and in writing if need be. And as House Deputy Secretary General for Public Information Nestor Alfonso stressed, the joint committee rulings are being advertised before the whole world. By the way, this may be the cause of it all. Some people opine that without the TV coverage there would be little proceedings.

The Noy-pi redux

Human Face

Mel. Cerez P. Dayo

Remember the government's Moral Recovery Program more than 20 years ago? Two former commissioners, one noted justice, two leaders of opinion and on television, arts and culture—commissioned a study of the strengths and weaknesses of the Filipino character "with a view to molding the moral life and strengthening the national identity."

I dug up the magazine piece I wrote on this years ago, with Ivan Herrera's cartoons spicing up the article ("What's wrong? What's right about the Noy-pi?" Sunday Inquirer Magazine, Oct. 3, 1993). I had a good laugh. Reading it again, I thought, we have been at this (the values thing) for more than a decade. If the disgusting component of our lawmakers in the canvassing of votes for president is any indication, then we have not moved forward in the values department, we have regressed. It also says a lot about those who elected them.

To remind, the 1986 study tapped experts in the fields of history, psychology, sociology and other social sciences, that is, the outside and the behavior modifiers, to figure out the Pinoy. Social psychologist Dr. Patricia Licuanan, then dean of the psychology department of the University of the Philippines, headed the project. Nine task forces, consisting of 10 experts each, were set up to explore, decipher, break down and reassemble the results of the study and formulate interviews and a nationwide survey. They surveyed some 3,000 respondents.

According to the study ("What is Filipino? Pinoy ka ba?" Building a People, Building a Nation), the strengths of the Filipino would be classified under three categories: pakikipagkapwa-tao, family orientation, joy and humor, flexibility, adaptability and creativity, hard work and industry, faith and religiosity, ability to endure.

The Filipino's weaknesses are a drama in desperation: extreme personalism, extreme family centeredness, lack of discipline, passivity and lack of initiative, colonial mentality, kanya-kanya syndrome, lack of self-analysis and self-reflection.

Licuanan and their task force group called through a lot of data and had to fight their academic interiors when they put the results together, so they wanted to come across as simply as possible. They could have come up with an endless list of things we do that are violations of values, but they chose to limit themselves to a few basic ones under which other ones could be classified.

Causes could have enumerated any that the study made mainly on the colonial factors under that on the pakikipagkapwa-tao, explained they were also damning the structural factors. In fact, they stated with the premise that we have structural defects, that we cannot wish for that competitive environment to happen before we do anything about structural flaws. But they could not overcome the resistance to happen before we do anything about structural flaws. But they could not overcome the resistance to happen before we do anything about structural flaws. But they could not overcome the resistance

Time for change inside Comelec

I THOUGHT that the job of the Commission on Elections was easy. Before any voting exercise, it has to make sure that the list of voters is ready. Purged are the names of those who died, moved away and registered in a different province, etc. Added are those who recently registered. During election time, it has to ensure that all registered voters who want to exercise their right of suffrage can able to cast their votes. Next is the counting of the votes and after that the proclamation of winners. Very simple tasks, as it's their job!

After the recent elections, I came to realize that the job of the Comelec is not as simple as I had thought. The Comelec has other things to do because some voters register in several places. And there are the untimely candidates, the disqualification cases. Still, I believe that the Comelec could have done a better job in the last elections.

I kept myself posted on the elections through the newspapers and I believe that the Comelec tried hard to do its job. But it did, terribly. It bungled its job for the following reasons:

1. It failed to clean up the voters' list.

2. The registration of new voters was a disaster.

3. A big number of registered voters were not able to cast their votes.

4. The counting and canvassing of the votes were a farce and the results are questionable.

To me, these are the basic responsibilities of the Comelec. Even if it was sidetracked by the Supreme Court decision which stopped its computerization project, the Comelec cannot justify enough its failure to deliver on its basic responsibilities.

All the more the Comelec commissioners should immediately assess their competence. A review should be made on how commissioners are screened and qualified. It's time we changed the people manning the Comelec, and this is a must if we want clean elections in the future.

—JON SUBIANO
Wanchai, Hong Kong
jonsanchan66@yahoo.com

Minimize rate escalation through hedging

THE GOVERNMENT should act now on the problem of escalating public utility rates, triggered by exchange losses on foreign loans, by amending its rules on privatization and on the awarding of government projects. Rate increases but already created instability in the service zone of Maynilad, Meralco and the Skyway. Before long, the problem, if not addressed immediately, will hit folk in the cities of the improved Ferdi Lances Expressway.

Rate escalation can be minimized and rate instability may be avoided through a mechanism that will allow exchange (re-)hedging on foreign loans. Such a hedge is offered by the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas. The borrower's ex-post list of books and articles on foreign exchange hedging may also be referred to the other options.

Putting exchange against foreign loans, winning bidders use the Filipino currencies as their hedging mechanism by recovering from them the exchange losses through government-approved rate escalation. This inequitable set-up, which can occur in the future, should be addressed right at the bidding for privatization projects, or at the awarding of BOT contracts, through the following criteria in the bidding or selection process:

- Require project proponents to compete not only on lowest initial user fees also on lowest user recovery, by requiring them to calculate's entire their rate escalation formulas at guaranteed future rates under present rules, then only bid on lowest initial rates.
- Require project proponents to compete on lowest debt-to-equity ratio, penalizes foreign borrowing, and/or bigger capitalization, to lessen reliance on foreign loans which are susceptible to exchange losses.
- Require the winning project proponents to institute foreign exchange hedging on their foreign borrowing, to avoid a repeat of Maynilad's disastrous failure to hedge on its $800 million share of the $4 billion foreign loan.

Bevel still, the government should maximize equity investments and peso-denominated loans to displace risky foreign loans as presented and BOT public service monopolies, by allowing more realistic rates of return and higher-than-average investor rates if need be. This option will come out cheaper in the long run as the foreign loans intended to be replaced stand higher carrying costs—interest expense plus hedging fees, or, in the absence of hedging, unpredictable exchange losses—that are ultimately passed on to consumers.

Rate increases should not be made to finance major improvements or expansion of facilities. This in effect forces consumers to pay for—but not own—the facilities.

—MARCELO L. TICSON, San Miguel, Bulacan
marcticson@yahoo.com

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LETTERS

Summary killings in vogue again

IF LEAST as far as media coverage is concerned, summary killings, after a short lull during the height of the election campaign, are back in vogue.

A 53-year-old brother was shot dead in front of her five kids as she was about to attend her home. An 18-year-old alleged gang leader was gunned down by two unidentified gunmen as she ran was walking along Pasay Boulevard in Davao. Government and media took killings and the way these were carried out here the imprints of the Davao Death Squad (DDS) and signal the resurgence of summary killings.

In another incident, a 16-year-old girl student of the Davao City Central High School was found dead by her mother inside her bedroom in their home at Matina Bangkas. The victim was strangled to death with a microphone wire. However, the social and economic status of the victim and the way she was killed do not indicate that the DDS did it. The DDS does away with its targets boldly in public.

Killings that have for most extrajudicially who belong to the upper echelons of society are solved in due time despite insufficiency of material evidence and the absence of any witness as in the case of the gruesome killing of the teenage girl in Mayfair Heights. In contrast, there is no hope of solution for summary killings even if done in public, before scores of, by perpetrators with unmasked faces.

—ROMEO S. ROSTRATA, overall coordinator, Lakas-ng Camarines Sur-Lakas ng Davao
rostrata@yahoo.com

US troops should not be exempted from Rome Statute

THE UNITED STATES is seeking to ensure the exemption of its troops from prosecution by the International Criminal Court. The exemption was granted last year through United Nations Security Council Resolution 1487. This immunity is set to expire soon.

The ICC is a permanent tribunal which has jurisdiction over perpetrators of genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and crimes against aggression, provided that any nationals of a state which is a party to the Rome Statute, including the ICC, or the international crimes charged were committed within its territory.

The United States is asking the Security Council to vote for this to avoid its ICC exemption, despite the Iraq War. Abuse prisoners at Abu Ghraib prison, Abu Ghraib which involved American troops.

Reuters has reported that Brazil, Spain, France and Germany have indicated that they will abstain from voting on the renewal of the US exemption, while China, Chile, Romania and Benin are considering the same. The Philippines, a signatory to the Rome Statute, though it has yet to ratify it, and as a member of the Security Council (and soon to assume its presidency), should not shirk from its responsibilities to uphold international law, particularly humanitarian and human rights laws.

Granting such exemption would in effect be allowing the United States to commit further atrocities around the world with impunity, which no doubt will prompt other nations, except by American cronies. Orbinac judgment must be denied for an increasingly warlike administration. The Philippines should reject any vote in favor of renewing the American exemption from ICC jurisdiction, or at the very least abstain from voting on any such resolution. A resolution of this sense is favor of renewal are necessary for the 15-member council to issue a new resolution. The United States must no longer be allowed to flout the very principles it purports to promote, and must be made accountable for its violations of international law.

—RAYMUND FELICIANO
C. SANDOVAL,
College of Law,
UP Diliman, Quezon City
raymundcsandoval@yahoo.com.ph

Highway used as parking lot for trucks

MAY I call attention to the trucks parked along the south-bound lane of Pelix Avenue, Cainta, Rizal, specifically near Shakey's, in front of the Shell gas station near the entrance of Vista Verde Country Homes.

The trucks, which number as many as 20, obviously belong to a junk shop located to that part of the road. Needless to say, they create a bottleneck and cause traffic jams that, for most of the working hours in the past two weeks, stretch up to half a kilometer or longer.

What right does this business have to use a very busy public highway at the expense of motorists? How can the police not see this open violation of law?

—TINA CORDERO,
Quisumbing Street, Vista Verde Country Homes, Cainta, Rizal

Bird flu is not SARS

MAY I comment on the remarks of the Inquirer's editorial entitled "Food and Safety" (PDI, 5/26/06) to the first sentence of the third paragraph, the statement before read, "Even the avian flu, otherwise known as the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS)..."

I check with the dictionary showed that "otherwise known" is synonymous with "also known as." But from what I've learned, avian flu is not the same as SARS. Quoting a news article, "...the World Health Organization warned that avian influenza, also called the bird flu, has the potential for being a more serious problem than SARS." So bird flu is therefore not SARS.

—HERMAN PASCASIAN,
norman.pascasian@pjgl.com.ph

Across the NATION
Assistant Editor Tony Bergonia

Mayors offer witnesses on NPA role in Isabela polls

By Wilfredo Visaya Jr.
PDI Northern Luzon Bureau

ILAGAN, Isabela—Gov. Faustino Dy Jr. said several mayors in Isabela have offered to provide key witnesses who will prove that the New People's Army had financed many members of its front group to vote for his rival, Mr. Ernesto Cabal Rufino, in the last elections.

He said the mayors had affirmed their "full support" for his bid for reelection.

"We know, in the province, there are many witnesses who could give their testimonies but many are bound not to speak in the interests. Some are heavily-bought. And are willing to speak the truth for the sake of restoring democracy in Isabela," Dy said.

He said in a phone interview that he had been receiving death threats from the NPA.

Dy's brother, reelected Isabela Rep. Faustino Dy III, earlier said the governor has been staying in Metro Manila since May 17 in a security precaution.

Alleged links

Dy cited Rufino's alleged links to the NPA and her use of terrorism to force residents to vote for her in favor of the rival.

Rufino denied Dy's allegations.

In recent TV and radio interviews, Rufino said she talked to Sen. Juan Ponce Enrile in the early 1990s when she was still a commissioner of the Sin. Benito Bufay.

But she said she did not meet with the rebels "before, during and after" she ran for governor this year.

"No one [among the MNLF] even approached me while I was campaigning," she said.

But Dy said it is "public knowledge" among Isabelinos that guerrillas supported on her NPA rebels have campaigned for Rufino on the eve of the elections to "subvert the end result of the election."

In a separate statement, he said the Communist Party of the Philippines was behind a plot to sabotage his candidacy.

Support

Sr. Isabela mayor, who asked not to be identified, said the mayors were out to show support for Dy's leadership and express appreciation for his "abiding love for humanity."

Another mayor who joined the meeting said a large group of supported NPA rebels within to two days before the May 10 elections and admitted to vote for Rufino.

"It would be very hard to prove that at this point."

He asked Isabelinos to energize "with a positive attitude" and remain calm while the disqualification case against Rufino is pending before the Comelec.

"Let us be more patient while waiting for the legal decision. But, if the votes are stolen, then the powers of democracy works in our country," he said.

The Comelec is scheduled to discuss the disqualification case on Friday.

PAMPANGA SYNDICATE

'Jueteng' monopoly taking shape

By Tonette Orejas
PDI Central Luzon Desk

CITY OF SAN FERNANDO—A monopoly of jueteng operations allegedly by the younger brother of suspected gambling lord Rodolfo "Boogie" Pineda is shaping up in Pampanga as politicians react to pay back election campaign contributions, a police official said.

"The employment [of Jojo] is a hot-running ground," the police official said, referring to the likely displacement of small jueteng operators and the reign of the "Virgo Group" supposedly led by Rodrigo Pineda.

Boogie Pineda lost his two-decade grip on the illegal numbers game in Central Luzon and several other regions after the ouster of his supposed patron, former President Joseph Estrada, in January 2001.

"Meanwhile na ng Virgo [Virgo will have a monopoly of the illegal numbers game]," the official said.

The source said that it is because newly elected Sen. Manuel "Lito" Lapid and his son, newly elected Pampanga Gov. Mark Lapid, have received support from Bong Pineda in the recent elections.

In April, Mark confirmed the support of Mayor Pineda for his bid. The Lapids, who ran in the United Nacionalista Alyansa, could not be reached for comment on Wednesday.

The police official said the Lapids, including some mayors and local officials, may soon cut ties with Mel-chor "Bye-Bye" Calingo, who is suspected of running the game in the capital city and other big towns in Pampanga's first district.

The monopoly, according to the official, "will be the result of the alliances of jueteng operators and politicians."

The takeover by the Virgo group, he said, would "eventually be complete by July."

Asked on the side of Bong Pineda in the new setup, the official said: "I have reasons to believe that he has diversified his businesses and that only his wealth, who should be bolted to the list Boogie spent in the game that has caused him great embarrassment."

Lubao Mayor Dennis Pineda said it was he, not his father, who supported Wish Lapid because Lapid is his "best friend."

Mayor Pineda said his father had not meddled in politics and is surrendered to various fiscal issues.

During the campaign period, Sonning Bong Pineda reportedly met with barangay captains to tell them to bolted his chosen candidates.

Babou Pineda could not be reached for comment.

CHOICES
A shop looks over piles of woodwork to choose from at a department store in Davao City to prepare for the opening of classes.

ROUNDUP

3 treasure hunters killed

PINAMALAYAN—Three men were killed on Tuesday when the tunnel they were digging caved in in Barangay Tagbong here. Police said Jaromie Bellaflores, 20, Mark Anthony Gagarin, 18, and Joe Tolentino, 30, suffocated when the tunnel they were constructing collapsed. In coincidence, Gregorio Bonga, 22, survived. But Senior Inspector Ramon Ramos, chief of the Pinamalayan police, said Bonga suffocated. He said the victims were digging for a candle. Both "They already found an antique hand mirror in the tunnel." (PDI) Lyndy Pantoja, municipal police chief, said Bonga could be accompanied the victims to get wooden blocks to prevent wind from getting.

John Eric Pantoja, PDI Southern Luzon Bureau

C. Calderon; 83

CAMARINES CITY—Former Camarines Sur governor Felicisimo S. Calderon died of pneumonia on May 27 in the Intensive Medical Center. He was 83. He was buried yesterday at Pacific-ongpole Memorial Park. He is survived by his seven children—Grace Jr., Benjamin, Ramon, Bobby Salazar, Rosemarie Rose, Jeanne Tinker, Ivy and Mary Jane Ragbeny.

Alan Pal, PDI Visayas Bureau

1 dead in collision

MEXICO, Pampanga—Two motorcycle riders were killed by Ramon City and another for this town, collided in a raging tourist Barangay Bacolor on Saturday, an unidentified passenger who was in the hill, died instantly while 24 other passengers were seriously injured. (PDI) Marcelino Cayanan, Olivo Mill police said some of the unknown motor passengers were rushed to the Ramon District provincial hospital here while others were brought to Ramon City.

Ferdinand Espinosa, PDI Northern Luzon Bureau

Swindler arrested

LUCENA CITY—Police arrested the suspected leader of counselling syndicate on detaining local top bosses in Southern Tagalog at the Quezon Central Bus Terminal in Barangay Dapdap Dapdap on Friday. Supt. Edgar Layos, Lamon police chief, identified Gregorio T. Pedro II Bolano, 32, of Angeles, Pampanga. Gregorio were in flight wanted to false checks amounting to P302,000 with private Lending institutions dealer worth P23,000. Police said the syndicate used fabulous names and fake identification documents.

Eddie Mahler Jr., PDI Southern Luzon Bureau

AFP, NDF trade raps on abduction of DENR men

BUTUAN CITY—The National Democratic Front (NDF) has urged the military to do more behind the abduction of a ranking environment official in the Caraga Region on Sunday.

Regional Undersecretary for Environment Jesus Mallen also for Dist. spokesperson of the NDF in Mindanao, said the abduction of Undersecretary Rustan Ragos, regional environment technical director for operation for the Caraga Region.

Composed mostly of Manobo and Mamanwa tribesmen, Bukil, which is based in Esperanza, Agusan del Sur, claims it is fighting for greater autonomy for tribal communities in the region.

Kim Belarg, Bukil's spokesperson, said his group was willing to free three captive if the DENR meets Bukil's demands and other groups such as forest and timber management to uphold their impoverished tribes.

According to him, Ramos, one of the 13 DENR men is found exempt was arrested by "pressuring" and "oppressing" their ancestral lands through massive illegal logging operations and mining.

Belarg denied allegations that the group abducted his victim.

"We're only doing this ... for [the] sake of our poverty-stricken communities," he said.

Col. Rogelio Rosete, commander of the division's 401st Infantry Brigade based here, also blamed the NDF's incursion saying it was aimed at discrediting the military.

"Purely propaganda. It's not true, the Bukil is a revolutionary group of the NPA," Rosete said. *With Ellie Calegasid, PDI Mindanao Bureau*

More and more kids driven to public schools by high tuition

By Gerardine Lacorte
PDI Mindanao Bureau

IMUS CITY—Most of the parents who pull their children away from private schools each year are scrambling behind a pile of payroll bills, a public school official here said.

Rising cost of education is forcing many parents here to pluck out their children from tutorial group to woo their ivy and carry out the crisis, Mallen added.

Armed men belonging to a group calling itself Bangkatan Liberation Front (BLF) emerged down on a beach resort in Buenavista town in Agusan del Norte and abducted Undersecretary Ragos, regional environment technical director for operation for the Caraga Region.

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"Purely propaganda. It's not true, the Bukil is a revolutionary group of the NPA," Rosete said. *With Ellie Calegasid, PDI Mindanao Bureau*

Dear said hundreds of parents from private schools came pouring into public schools each year, as they find it hard to swallow another round of tuition increases in private schools.

Kapitan Pantas Montessorie's 4,000-student elementary school, one of the largest public schools in Dr. city, is expected to enroll with transferees, she said.

Among those who will find herself inside the 139-year-old public school campus is Lyssa Gil-lermain, 40, whose child John Richard comes from the Holy Child Academy.

But at the Kapitan Pantas Montessorie, she only paid P295, including a P50 Parent-Teachers Association fee, to enroll her child.

Of the 233 students that Kapitan Pantas interviewed between the previous week, 80 percent came from private schools. The rest come from different public schools in the city.

But most of those who came in here in the past were parents who were leaving behind huge, unpaid debts in the private schools where they came from, Dear said.

Comelec hit for allowing mayor's 4th term

KIBALIGIC, Sinaguinan—A businessman here assailed the Commission on Elections for allowing his rival, incumbent Bhay Mayor Morales, to be presidential winner in the mayoral race despite a disqualification rule over Morales' running for a fourth term.

"The Commission, the local government codes are blatantly being violated. If the Comelec can't implement the laws of the land, we can't collect, what will?" businessman Anthony Tee asked.

The Comelec's second division, in a 10-page resolution on May 6, ruled that Morales had "tacked [still] served three consecutive terms" and was not eligible to run for mayor of Mabalacat in the May 10 elections.

It said that his six-month preventive suspension over a graft case and an electoral dispute with Jaz, both in 1998, made "no effective interruption" of his second term of the mayor.

The second division said the "noble purpose behind the preventive suspension will be defeated and will instead become a convenient tool for those who are on their third and last terms to indirectly circumvent the constitutional provision limiting the service in public official can, stand to three consecutive terms."

The resolution was signed by Commissioners Mehol Sadain, Florentino Tuason Jr. and Manuel Barcelona Jr.

But lawyer Member Dalang of the Comelec's law department, through a telegram on May 8, advised the Mabalacat election officer to disregard a May 7 order deleting the name of Morales from the certified list of names of candidates and windowing the votes cast for him as zero.

The order was issued because the decision of the commission has "not yet become final and executory," Dalang's telegram said.

Morales, the official candidate of the administration Lakas-Christian Muslim Democrats, filed a motion for reconsideration before the Comelec en banc. He was ignited four commissioners including Dee, a candidate of the Bukidnon Cayetanopapa.

Morales said Dee has to "recuse from process."

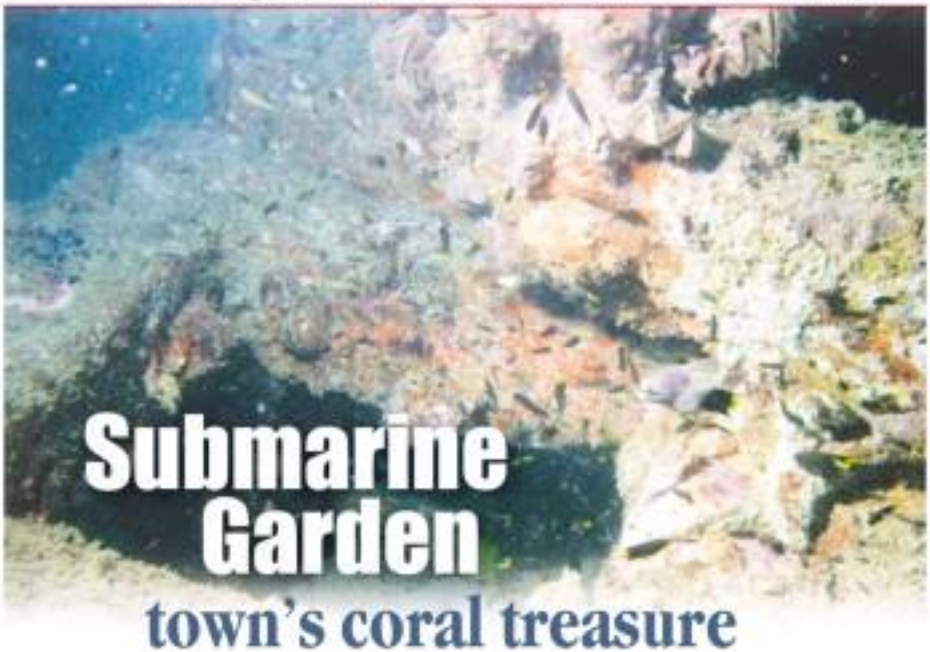
Even so, Dee said the second division's resolution was "very clear on exactly how many terms [Morales] has actually served."

He also criticized lawyer Tonie Lambino, Pampanga election supervisor, for "acting as spokesperson to Morales." Lambino, Dee said, had been hired defending the mayor in cache in interviews.

But Lambino said he only explained the case and the laws involving the issue. He said his action should not be misinterpreted as favoring either side.

Dee vowed to pursue the disqualification case against Morales to the end. *Rosalyn Orejas, PDI Central Luzon Desk*

INQUIRER Southern Luzon
Editor Jun Bandayrel
Bureau Chief Florante G. Solmerano



Submarine Garden
town's coral treasure

By Mel Magsino
Lobo, Batangas

THE WRECKAGE of two Japanese ships, which sank off Barangay Sawang in Lobo, Batangas, during the last days of World War II in 1945, can hardly be seen even beneath, a submarine-shaped formation of corals has emerged and declared a fish sanctuary.

"We think it's nature that turned something tragic in 1945 into what we now have—the Submarine Garden, a marine paradise and fish sanctuary that remains untouched up to today," said Jojo Manalang, owner of a resort in Sawang, 30 km south of Batangas City.

Divers who have flocked to the Submarine Garden have not found only a few remnants of the sunken vessels.

"We found a giant steel anchor about 15 meters from the shore," Manalang said.

"We are planning to put up that anchor inside the resort and family it with cameras. That way, nobody can take it and all our guests can see it on display," he said.

Fish sanctuary

Manalang said the municipal government declared the Submarine Garden a fish sanctuary five years ago. When the villagers, fishermen and local fisheries officials discovered that the sanctuary attracted more and more fishes, the entire 2-km shoreline and 300 to 500 meters the shores have been declared a protected area.

"The people of Lobo are now very much aware of the benefits of preserving the environment," Manalang said. "Fishermen don't enter the fish sanctuary to catch fish. They stay outside the sanctuary to guard it and do their fishing in other areas."

About 15 meters from the shore, the water is so clear you can see fish swimming, while a big blue starfish lies bathing in the morning sun. Where at least deep is also clear that one can see a seahorse swimming near the corals.

Profiling Calaguio City in Oriental Mindoro and nearby Verde Island, the view is dotted by small boats and passenger ships dragging rain of boats.

The beach is not just white sand and corals, as cottony-red trees. A path through marginer town, a footbridge over the Sawang River and the remains of the two sunken ships are more than enough to satisfy any marine-scientists.

Natural museum

As the fish sanctuary has turned into a marine paradise, Manalang's resort has become a natural museum for endangered animals.

One of the best diving spots is the 15-ft Orange Sponge coral mountain that reveals an colorful top during low tide. Sea turtles still come to lay eggs, while dolphins are seen at least twice a month.

Flying fish jumping in unison is a common sight. At night, luminous plankton light up the water and the underwater garden.

On land, wild oats, cloud tree, palm civets, pogo (snails), lubago (wild chicken) and migratory birds thrive, as the law forbids hunting in the entire protected area.

Century-old bamsal trees grow in what used to be a coral formation that turned into black rocks before the three hills called the Monte Cuadros. The near extinct Philippine teak tree abounds, along with century-old tamarind, talisay, camachile and other flora bearing trees.

At the right side of the resort, just after the gate, is a footpath in the mangrove trail where crabs, edible snails and shells are plenty. At the end of the trail is a wooden footbridge crossing the river into Barangay Talon, where a blue-green lagoon awaits.

"When (former) Tourism Secretary (Richard) Dick Gordon came here in 2002, he was so amazed at the resort that he started working on a presidential proclamation to declare Sabtangan Garden a marine park," Manalang said.

According to him, his family's plan for the resort is not ready to develop it but to retain its natural beauty.

"We're hoping that Submarine Garden would see an example to other coastal resorts to protect their seas, their shores and their trees. The Submarine Garden is now Lobo's natural treasure," he said. "If we have succeeded here, other towns can do that, too."

MD submarine sunk here, japs were Japanese warships in 1945. Colorful corals now cover the remains of the sunken ships.

RESORT guests cross a footbridge leading to a blue lagoon.

tanong ng Bayan
Teka, kailangan bang mag-aral para umasenso?
ABC

Albay festival calms down with new 'hot' event

By Gil Francis G. Arwenio
Legazpi City

SILI King Armando Murillana ate 550 pieces of sili (hot pepper) in just three minutes during the month-long Magayon Festival in Albay three years ago.

Breaking the skillfully of breaking Murillana's record, the Albay Tourism Council (ATC) decided to replace the festival's most popular event last May into a "Sili Vessel Eating" contest. Contenders would no longer eat raw sili but two of the province's most popular "hot" meals—the Bicol Express and the laing.

The Bicol Express, locally known as "pinky na laoks," is vegetables cooked in coconut milk with pork, shrimps, dried fish and bagoong (fish paste). The laing is pork leaves cooked with coconut milk and usually mixed with chili, as Albayanos would prefer it.

Around

The event, which was held May 14 at the Peñaranda Park in Legazpi City, surprised spectators, but they were amazed by the way the contestants took the challenge.

"We're happy because although it may look like a non-Bicolano character challenge game, most spectators accepted the contest, for the bottom line is still Bicolano delicacies with very hot and spicy flavor," said provincial tourism officer Reggie Ura.

Ura said the council had to scrap the all-eating competition because during the last three years, most of the contestants experienced abnormal heartbeat, chest pain, and sudden run to blood pressure, and were brought to the hospital. Many of them also collapsed.

To prevent accidents, the ATC required all contestants to undergo a medical check-up, he said.

Albay holds the world record for all-eating Bicolano a listed in the 2002 Guinness Book of World Records as the "Sili King of the World." Edberto Gonzales, the first "Sili King of Albay" and first world record holder, once feasted more than 300 pieces of chili pepper. Last year's fastest woman, Belinda Nitoa, ate 450 pieces.

Among women, Noreen Meñarete is the record holder. She ate more than 300 pieces of sili in 2001.

More challenging

Last month's winners, Salvacion Matos, 38, and eating the woods was more challenging. Aside from eating one to two heads of each vessel, she said, the taste had a mix of very hot and spicy red hot chili, plus coconut milk. She finished eating it about two hours in two minutes and 36 seconds.

Last year, Matos placed second in the all-eating contest to then-champion Meñarete, who swallowed 250 pieces. Matos was able to eat only 195 pieces.

The biggest surprise this year was the winner in the male category. William Monal of Bonsucro Legazpi, a first-time contestant and self-styled, finished one and a half heads of the Bicol eaten in just twenty-two minutes and 42 seconds.

"It feels great to win and overcome challenges like this, but I do believe that I can't beat the challenge anymore. I didn't practice for this, neither am I fond of eating Bicol delicacies with red hot chili," Monal said.

For the record, no contestant was hospitalized during the challenge.

METRO
Editor Abelardo S. Manalay

Take a Boulevard jeep in style

By Terry V. Quiamzon

THE KING of Metro Manila's roads has expanded to kingdom, total reach: 6.05.

For the first time, the passenger jeepney (plus the humble mode of Banaa Boulevard R-one in Manila is said to the southern city of Muntinlupa, and with a number other additions and amendments.

"The passengers find riding our jeepneys very convenient," said Cesar Galvez, 51, who drives one of the five that now cruise the Coastal Road, reinvented for its commanding views of protected-party Manila Bay scenery.

Since May, Galvez has been ferrying passengers with his two-seater jeepney-transport from their terminal on Bagumbayan Drive to Intramuros, fronting the National Press Club, to the entrance of the Ninoy Aquino International Airport in Barangay, competing with the ubiquitous 75 taxis found for Cavite that also take the Roxas Boulevard route from 6 a.m. to 12 midnight.

Designed by his cousin, Orlando Marquez Jr., the 25-seater colorful-type, aluminum body is the trend a week before the elections.

As a promo gimmick, passengers, by means of Manila Bay's offer employees and tourists looking for a ride out of the Walled City enjoyed free rides the entire week.

The ride costs P8 for the first four kilometers, but the "Sunday Inn-shine," a ride from Intramuros to Nino was double, or P16. From to Manila terminal to the Cultural Center of the Philippines Complex on Roxas One Street, the fare is P6, while Inchon-based passengers pay P12 for a one-way trip.

"There aren't that many passengers who go in the terminal," says Galvez. "We pick up most of our passengers along the way, and most of them get off at Baclaran."

Marquez, the jeep's maker and president of the Makati Jeepney Operators and Drivers Alliance Inc. (MODAI), also designed the first air-conditioned jeepneys that began plying routes in Makati's central business district in 1996.

His patented design, an innovation of the model improvised from US army type jeepneys left behind after the Second World War, is transformed from paper to basic at PC Motors, a jeepney workshop in Taytay, Rizal. Galvez said that most of those public utility vehicles are now being made in the case of P650,000 per unit.

Smooth ride

Handling the jumbo jeepney with its steering wheel requires and power steering, encased in stainless steel to protect the line of bliss, is easy as pie for Galvez, a professional driver since 1979. "It's easy to drive, and even lighter to handle than a bus or a regular jeepney," he said.

Having driven regular jeepneys and buses around Metro Manila, and two-deck buses in Hongkong in the early '80s, he found the airconditioned jeepney "a smoother drive."

Unlike the traditional jeepney with a rear high-step entrance, the jumbo sized jeepney welcomes passengers through a sliding door on the right side, just like a bus.

The jumbo jeep also has no door by the driver. Double seaters the 25 passengers capacity ensures having the front, at the rear is a south-like five seaters. All the seats are covered in red leatherette fabric.

Cheap thrills

For those who are not school or office-bound, taking this ride could be one of the cheapest forms of sightseeing in the metro. The regular ride brings locals (tsoi) and foreign tourists to Luneta Park for a glimpse of the monument of national hero Jose Rizal, the Roxas Boulevard Baywalk that translates into a glittering metro the night revelers, the Manila Yacht Club, the CCP complex, and of course, a view of the misleading glory of the Manila Bay sunset.

On regular days, Galvez makes around P1,000, and adds P300 more to his take-home pay when passenger pick-ups are more frequent by the roadside. Riding business isn't too good, he notes for P800.

Galvez noted that passengers who use their public jeepneys on the road for the first time seem apprehensive about taking a ride on the streets jeepneys. But he is not about to give up on the thing.

"Once they know how safe and comfortable it can be, I am sure they will not hesitate to take a ride," said Galvez.

WAY TO GO. Sleek and colorful air-conditioned jeepneys compete with other famed attractions of Roxas Boulevard, and could be one of the cheapest ways to go sightseeing in the metro.

Work stops at Malabon City Hall after blaze

By Edson C. Tandoc Jr.

THE FIRE that hit the Malabon City Hall on Tuesday has forced work in local government offices to grind to a halt, and no one knows when transactions would resume.

Residents who trooped to City Hall yesterday were met by a small cardboard sign informing them that offices were closed for business.

Ferdinand Garcia, 53, who has been following up the certificate of clearance inspection for his house in Barangay Baritan Bunsuan, was at a loss on what to do and where to go.

When asked, security officers at the entrance of the building said visitors to just come back next week. They, however, could not say whether offices would already be open by then.

Tambiso urges:

Even outgoing Mayor Maln Albas "Jaypee" Tambiso was unsure when services would resume.

He said they could not open City Hall to visitors or employees until the Bureau of Fire Protection (BFP) finishes an investigation into the cause of the fire.

According to Malabon BFP chief Rodrigo Reyes, a task force was still investigating the cause of the blaze that gutted the entire second floor of the three-story building.

Reyes said the probe by a task force was suspended procedures when the burned structure was a government building.

Announcing the investigation to be close, Tambiso instructed city administrator Elvira Nebares to look for possible sites for temporary offices.

Camaraderie turned Reyes into suspect

By Leila B. Salaverria

ANGELES, the Filipino form of camaraderie, changed the life of Reina Reyes, the other suspect in the rape-slay of bank cashier Candice Cortez.

Reyes, the 23-year-old son of the town of Investigation intelligence officer Bienvenido Reyes, showed up at the National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) headquarters in Manila and related the allegations against him.

Accompanying Reyes to the lawyer and mother, Connie, Reyes told media that he never knew Cortez and only saw her in the news after her death.

He also said that he never met the other suspect, Philippe Marcelo, until the night before Cortez's body was discovered on May 11.

It was Marcelo who implicated Reyes in the killing of the Metrobank employee inside her car at Bellagio Tower on Leon Guinto Street, Manila.

"I want to make it clear that Marcelo's accusations against me are not true," he said yesterday.

Reyes, a business management student at the Perpetual Help College in Laguna, said he rarely went to Bellagio Towers except to drive his sister whenever she visited their parents, who lived there.

On the night of May 11, Reyes had a drinking spree with Marcelo's half brother, Jaime Santiago, out of "boredom."

Marcelo joined them. During the drinking session, Marcelo bragged that he could have his way with any woman from Bellagio.

Turned off, Reyes left but not after Marcelo angrily threatened him saying, "Why mess in on (How the will enter)."

His voters deserve Jinggoy

ON TARGET
Rainier Tiglao

NOW THAT Jinggoy Estrada, son of deposed President Erap, has been elected senator, he should be a little less arrogant.

Jinggoy is not known for humility. In fact, when his father was still in power, he rubbed people the wrong way because of his haughtiness.

So because a little humble when he was elected senator, Jinggoy said that he's sure that he will be acquitted. Here can he be so sure?

This poor imitation of Joseph Estrada, the actor, thinks the world owes him a living.

When he applied for a gun license when his father was still the president, he was asked, as a matter of procedure, to submit to a drug test. He got mad. Why should he, he said, when he's the son of the country's top honcho? The chief of the firearms and explosives office, which houses gun licenses, had to head west and accommodate the president's son.

When he met a couple of friends went to Los Angeles, California, after graduating, Jinggoy pontificated among his friends

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PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

THURSDAY JUNE 3, 2004

ENTERTAINMENT

Editor Louie C. Camino

Lolit: Osang might be suffering from effects of drugs

By Nini Valera

IN STEAD of rape, talent manager and TV talk show host Lolit Solis has only compassion and understanding for her actress-sister Rosanna Roces, who knows as Osang, with whom she had a falling out late week over published reports that Osang's daughter was pregnant by Sen. Bong Revilla's son Jolo.

Lolit, known in the industry for her fiery frankness, said she is wondering if Osang is in her proper senses and right state of mind.

Lolit was recovering in the US when taipan Entertainment talked to her by phone last Sunday. She was reported back in Manila yesterday.

"I'm worried she might be suffering from the effects of her favorite addiction to Shabu (a brand of sedatives)," said Lolit. "I at this time have to be saying those things against me. I could be wrong, but Osang might be affected by the drugs she took."

In an interview with Inquirer Entertainment last year, the actress admitted that she got hooked on Shabu, but that she had undergone rehabilitation and therapy for substance abuse.

Lolit said she was saddened by the turn of events.

The talent manager said she could understand Osang's anger but she would not comprehend why Osang would accuse her of malice and of stealing money from her in the form of inbound commissions from talent fees and endorsements. The actress counters for monies, product endorsements and personal appearances.

"I feel especially sad for Grace (Osang's 15-year-old daughter), who is not to blame ALL," said Lolit.

Earlier Lolit had admitted telling Sr. Vicki Belo that Osang was worried if one was pregnant. The Belo was inadvertently leaked to the media when Sr. Belo asked several entertainment reporters over dinner if it was true that Grace was pregnant.

The actress and the dermatologist, former friends, are embroiled in a controversy after Osang accused the doctor of destroying her body with a botched liposuction procedure and of using her to promote Belo's chain of Fabulous Skin Clinics without proper compensation. She also alleged that the Belo skin clinics caused injury to some of its clients who had gone there for treatment.

Lolit claimed she had no bad feelings against Osang, even if the valiant manager insisted that she would no longer be managing the actress.

"Sus, bygone na," said Lolit. "I regain full disclosure and total trust from my talents. But I am not angry at her (either). I wish her the best of luck. She once told me that after she had earned a substantial amount of money, when her show was over, she would be quitting as she would grow up to produce with her children. I told her in my birthday message to her (on "Showbiz" on May 22) that this might be the best time for her to do that since Grace is 15 and is in that stage where she needs her mother's guidance more."

Osang also has a son, 13-year-old Daryle. She has never been married, but is planning to marry her longtime companion, Bro Mobius, in October.

"Among my talents, I saw Osang the most often," said Lolit, who also manages the shows his current co-actors Rodjun Cruz (Christopher de Leon, and actress Carina Tolentino.

"We met each other every Sunday," said Lolit. She and Osang are co-hosts of the Saturday afternoon show his talk show "Startalk" on GMA 7.

Lolit also expressed surprise why Osang chose to give her side of the controversy to the rival of "Startalk," ABS-CBN's "The Buzz." When told that the actress had said Lolit "I had not asked her to air her side, Lolit said "why be one of the hosts and she couldn't give her side on any issue during the show."

Osang had told Inquirer Entertainment over the weekend that she would quit show biz to protest her family. She claimed she received P400,000 a month for hosting the show, but that she would give that up for peace in her family.

The actress and her companion, Tess Jaime invested in a loan in Sagay City. They also own an auto detailing shop and a bar in Quezon City. Tito, a former executive at the Asian Development Bank, has managed Osang's income wisely, the actress said.

"We have saved for the time that I would no longer be in show biz," Osang told Inquirer Entertainment after her Sunday. "I am not scared to leave show biz. I have planned for my family's future. Thanks to Tito, we have money and property. I lead a very simple life. My home is not a mansion; I don't have luxurious autos. I have enough money to send my children to school abroad."

She revealed that Grace refuses to enroll in a local school this semester following the pregnancy issue.

"Sayang ang buo (It's such a waste for the child)," Osang said. "She has high hopes and big dreams. She was planning to take up culinary arts. Now she does not want to go back to school here. But she agreed to it only if I save her abroad. Thank God I enrolled to do that. What Shawn (Gutierrez) could do for RC (Concepcion, who is studying in Europe), I can do for Grace and Daryle."

Osang has not decided whether she would appear on "Startalk" this Saturday. She renewed her contract with GMA 7 about two months ago.

SOLID. "It's not like her to be saying those things against me," she says of her ward.

"POTTER" is from "a family of wizards."

"HERMIONE" is "an alkaloid or chloroform."

Harry Potter casts spell on Baguio City master

BAGUIO CITY—The world's most famous Muggle-born witch, Hermione Granger, now has been added her list of Baguio university's academic interest in Harry Potter.

The University of the Cordilleras (UC, formerly the Baguio Colleges Foundation) has been offering elective subjects on the phenomenon a line of doctoral and graduate school dissertations on contemporary Filipino pop culture references, which include the mythologies of J.K. (Joanne Kathleen) Rowling's novels and C.S.L. (John Ronald Reuel) Tolkien's "Lord of the Rings."

Michelle Estimerala-Espique, an English teacher, a UC's junior master, the current her degree on May 8 by dissecting the notion that Rowling had invented for the characters in her fairy Potter series.

Giving contemporary sociological theories about Filipino name-giving, as well as linguistic theories on fiction, Espique said the heroes and villains in Rowling's novels were named to suit their roles in the plot, their personalities and their secrets.

The name Harry Potter, she points out, is rooted in the noun "potter" or maker of pots, which is a fitly coined name for the resident of wizards or wizardess, hence a reference to a family of wizards.

Espique says the name Hermione is an allusion to chemistry, because Hermione's mother, Jean Granger, was a dentist who used chloroform on her patients.

Espique also drew into underground to see study which theories that chloroform is the soul hero of the story Potter books.

Dr. Cecilia Basaen, dean of the UC graduate school program, said the university encourages students applying new scientific methodologies or the latest linguistic theories on their masteral theses.

Basaen said she allowed a graduate school student to do a similar linguistic analysis of "Lord of the Rings."

The sociological issues of the university's students have also focused on Cordillera materials or Filipino pop culture.

Some of this has exposed the university to criticism from fellow scholars, she said. In Espique's case, one of her thesis, "there is current interest in using Harry Potter as a literary work under study."

Basaen said the students who look into the Harry Potter lore for their theses are young professionals, who are not mainstream students.

The "Lord of the Rings" cinematography by director Peter Jackson have ushered cultural realistic and animistic, while the third Harry Potter film, "Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban," has opened to Philippine audiences.

Basaen said those materials have rid English cultural backdrops that are ripe for study by Filipino linguists, sociologists or historians.

Eleanor Gabriana, PDI Northern Luzon Bureau

SPORTS

E-mail: sr_sports@inquirer.com.ph
Editor Teddyboy V. Molavedra

HIGHLY Dagold (fourth from left) charges at the finish to win his semifinal heat in the 100-meter dash over a field that included three Thai sprinters.

NATIONAL OPEN INVT'L

Ferrera rips own mark

By Marc Anthony Reyes

ANGEL Ferrera bucked the driving rain that drenched Rizal to shine and shatter the barometer in a record-breaking performance yesterday's Day 2 of the National Open Invitational track and field championships at the Rizal Memorial stadium.

The burly Silver (1) Ferrera made only two attempts in the competition on short by minutes-rain that wrought havoc with the afternoon events. He employed a new technique on his second try—pirouetting almost halfway around the runway before launching—and cleared 15-32 meters.

The Cavayan, Negros-bombshell native surpassed his own national mark of 15-20m he set in winning the gold in last year's Vietnam Southeast Asian Games.

"I just threw it as hard as I can because raindrops were hitting my eyes," said the 22-year-old Ferrera after breaking the record for the fifth time in two years.

"My entrance paid off after turning in Baguio City," added the airman in the Special Services Group of the Philippine Air Force under Col. Froilan Relucio Jr.

Sharing the limelight with him were Mercurella Torres and Arby Lorada.

Torres leaped 6-10 m for the women's long jump gold, beating fellow national teammate Marisol Silbap (5-7¼ in). Rosita Wini Mayag-Wee (see Box) with 5.40m.

Long jump queen Jamie Balmonte, didn't let setbacks or concussions as she can register 200 meters dashes for field today.

Lorada dominated the men's 800m in one minute, 53.29 seconds, beating Jordan Olivero of the Air Force (1:55.27) and Jim Oco of Bicolo City (1:55.33).

Gary Gilday'an of the disabled PAAsia Inst. did not finish in the men's 400 but this did by Thailand's Tompom Pavan in 53.29 seconds. San Sebastian College's Genaro Ellis remains was second.

Ayalon 1 Eudoc Bayan easily qualified for today's men's 400 finals with a 47.70 clocking. The 26-year-old Long Beach, California native said he is confident of beating his own mark of 46.18, which is better than the SF mark of 46.8.

In other events, Melinda Mendoza of the Navy topped the women's 10,000m walk, Rosie Ellorico of the army won the women's javelin throw, Roberto Fernando of the PAF nailed the men's discus throw and Librado Tamayo of the University of Baguio triumphed in the women's 800m.

Dan Ron of Orion defeated Hanya Ardino in the women's 100m hurdles with a time of 1:16.65 seconds. Ardano, representing Bulacan, timed 15.13 seconds.

Aces beat Tigers to No. 2 seed

[illegible] (Philippine Arena)
3 Pts in — Cone Gilas to Purefoods
4:30 p.m. — Talk N Text to Sunkist

By Jane Manaloy

All Star dominated the third line to shoot-to-pulled Coca-Cola, 90-75, to secure the second quarterfinals spot last night in the Coca-Monster PBA Open Conference at the Araneta Coliseum.

Unstoppable in the paint, Peek banged in 11 points in the third quarter, helping the Aces outscore a 46-29 halftime deficit. Peek had 16 points and 12 rebounds for Alaska, which replaced Mark Sanford Ang injury in the football.

When Peek finished his downfallen job, Brandon Cabatu and John Arigo took over and eyed the win with outside shots as the Aces pocketed the No. 2 seed at the end of the eliminations round.

Sanford jumped in 28 points and collected 16 rebounds but became a liability in the third quarter as the Aces relentlessly collapsed on him underneath the basket.

Coca-Cola coach Chot Reyes decided to rest Sanford out of the game with still eight minutes to play and the Aces already poised for second, 79-66.

ALASKA 90—Young 25, Ildefo 11, Peek 16, Abalo 11, Arigo 4, Dyal 1, Pinto 6, Cortez 4, Ritter 6, Pabilo 1.

COCA-COLA 75—Sanford 28, Ramos 10, Manuel 6, Reyes 7, Ibanez 6, Bolick 6, Cortez 6, Dyal 2, Ramos 1, Pingatoc 2, Jabo 3, Laurencio 2, Jurado 2.

Quarters: 25-21, 47-46, 69-56, 90-75.

All set for maiden Inquirer Badminton expo

BADMINTON can't possibly get any bigger than this.

To set the courts that host queen and On sport? To anyone who can't go to PLDT, to the doubleness who have led the players' hunger for equipment, to the media outlets that provide the game as a venue to boom its popularity—the first Inquirer Badminton expo is set to end up the talk-to-dusty audio out-reel.

The season of the exhibition in the event, which will be held on June 5 and 6 at the Megatrade Hall 2 of the SM Megamall, for lack none of the country's biggest names in sports.

Adidas, Mizuno, Mizuno and Yonex and even huge fans like Zenni, Inc. Miguel Corp. and Unilever are joining badminton courts, equipment distributors as well as apparel makers in the three.

Philippine Daily Inquirer president Sandy Prieto-Romualdez, a former national player, will lead the opening ceremonies together with invited guests at 10 a.m. on Saturday.

As booths open for public viewing, action in the Smart Gilas Challenge kicks off. Three Olympian Nimrod Lim holds a clinic is sponsored by Bengzo.

Asteroid Jimmy Ines, Jose Miguel Bautista City will hold a big bash for the invited guests of the expo dubbed as the "Expo Is Hired. Inter Badminton party with Unilever performing.

The second day will be highlighted by the finals round of the Smart Gilas Challenge as well as clinics by Lim and Ateneo expert Tim Ann. Spicing up the expo are the major promotions by Apacs, Speedhorse, Dilmon, Kinyon and Gosen.

Crucial games up

[illegible] (Ateneo Campus)
2 p.m. — Ateneo vs Ateneo Purefoods
4 p.m. — Alaska vs Coca-Cola

YESTERDAY'S first of four finals slots already taken by Ateneo (11-2), three-seeds will in contention are expected to fight and draw for the last finals.

Defending champion Ateneo (7-6), undefeated powerhouse Alaska (6-5) and newcomer Tanduay (5-6) have already guaranteed themselves a ticket in a round-doubleheader today in the PBL 2nd Unity Cup at the Makati Coliseum.

SPORTSWATCH

Zaleta barges into Phalta Open q'finals

SECOND seed Ilias Zaleta marched into the ladies singles quarterfinals with an abbreviated 6-1, 6-1 victory yesterday over Olinda Valle in the DYES Phalta Open at the Filoil Memorial Tennis Center. Zaleta, who topped the National Open in Cebu last week, next faces fifth seed Ivy de Castro, who whipped Anthea Rocha, 6-2, 6-0. Top seed Czarina Elle Arevalo of Manila defended unseeded Jhen Elle of UST, 6-2, 6-0, to advance against lowly Glen Ann Gaviola, who ousted No. 7 Catherine Rivera, 7-6, 6-3, 6-2. Also advancing were third seed Aprilyn Ann Lalap, who beat Hyde Patricinio, 6-1, 6-2; No. 4 Aileen Rogan, who blasted Kristel Sarmiento, 6-0, 6-0; and Nikki Bautista, who stunned No. 5 Irene Santos, 6-4, 6-1, to reach singles. No. 3 Violeto Ruel Jr. outclassed Benito Cebedoro Jr., 6-1, 6-1, to advance in the quarterfinals against Alexander Lorenzo, while Allen Riego de Dios, 6-2, 7-6, Glenn Alvarez won No. 4 Patrick Jake Tanoi over Gilbert Umali, 6-0, 7-6, Chemrol Marina over Antonio Segovia, 6-1, 6-4, 6-2, and Jean Lapon over Leo Leung, 6-4, 6-0.

Air Force capers sink NBDB leader Navy

Air Force snapped Navy's winning streak at three as it broke into three-all column after three games with a come-from-behind 65-60 victory in the NBDB (National Basketball Development League) Founders Cup tournament last Monday at the Ateneo University gym. Striker Ojar Gonzaga sparkled as Col. Pedrito Nuñeza's airmen narrowed a 10-44 deficit to just two-four since the six-team series organizer-birthdayer. Playing manager Col. Bienvenido Enrile's Army-based foe piled Philippine Bar, 19-11, in the roller game to share the lead with Navy at 3-1.

Ex-Stag chaser rules MCC active tourney

QUEZON seed Ramona Cruz stormed top-seed Jose Aquino Jr. in 18 minutes of a Five Lower variation in the fifth-and-final round to top the MCC 2004 active ladies chess tournament held over the weekend at the Ali Mall in New Manila, Quezon City. Playing white, the former San Sebastian College standout pushed four wins and one draw for a final tally of 4.5 points to claim the second MCC title and the P2,500 winner's prize of the one-day event organized by the Metropolitan Chess Club. In solo second with 4.0 points was fourth seed Erlinda Belen of College of St. Benilde who beat Angelito Cruz Jr. in 37 moves of a Sicilian game. Third seed Joel Gonzales who represented Los Angeles Impossible in 36 moves of another Sicilian encounter. Belen took the second place cash prize of P1,500 while Gonzales received P1,000. In the unrated event, Alvin Ritualo of Mandaluyong Mining triumphed with 4.5 points while 13-year-old Ariane Angelo Gutierrez won the ladies award with 3.0.

ONWARD(S) Pinggoy (third from left), winner of the recent Pagsanjan, Laguna leg of the Bcast Zest-O Palakbong Pinoy, with runner-up Darwin Meneses, Christopher Cruzcosme and Sanggunian Kabataan head Jayr-an Blanco. The Manila Boomers and Sports Promoters award goes to San Juan, Batangas on June 13 for its sports-ing billed as the Laiya Marathon.

OVERNIGHT leader Mendoza points to the direction of his tee shot on No. 7. RAM SPEED

RP AMATEUR

Dumandan tops elims; Juvic out

By Manong Carrillo, Contributor

THERE won't be a Marvin Dumandan-Jovic Pagensan duel for the 2004 Philippine Amateur Golf Championship.

Dumandan fired at par with evil-free aberrations to card a two-under 70 and top the 36-hole qualifying, while Pagensan shot himself in the foot with an 84 to miss the cut by one shot on a Villamor layout that played long because of countryside showers.

Pagensan hit just two fairways and wrestled with his putter all day. If he hadn't been paired for the first time—he already had five three-putts—the tournament favorite would have found a playoff for the final slot in the match play, which he starts today.

"I played terrible," said Pagensan in Filipino as he headed for his car in a huff after learning of the 13th cut. "I couldn't hit a straight drive, couldn't answer a putt. I had three-putted No. 3, I could have made it."

Jovic, whose stars of 11 and 13 was marked by five straight bogeys from No. 12 and a double on 17, four-putted No. 3 for a double bogey six. It ultimately landed his chances of joining today's 32-man draw teeming at 5 a.m.

Dumandan, who started with a 75 like Pagensan, had only birdies and a bogey on each nine. He took the No. 1 seeding from one-stroke leader Antonio Marchaval, who ballooned to a 79 and dropped to the No. 3 slot.

Dumandan drew 20-Tambunting, rabbi No. 2 Louis Dalandan, who submitted a 75-73-148, while three-Richard Gelo Gamos. Marchaval opposes self-told Hong Kong-bound.

Tournament bosses rolls for the field to play one round today and the round-of-16 and the quarterfinals tomorrow. The semifinals will be on Saturday, with the 36-hole finals set on Sunday.

The other pairings: No. 4 Dolor Simon (146—72-74) vs. No. 29 Joel Quan (153—80-73); No. 5 Alan Sumaoang (148—75-73) vs. No. 28 Jonah Sabido (150—77-73); No. 6 Ramon Ito (150—77-73) vs. 27 Jong Capal (150—76-74); No. 7 Brad Sangster (150—76-74) vs. 26 Gene Inocencio (142—76-70); No. 8 Jag Bayron (151—76-75) vs. 25 Paul Milan (146—70-76); No. 9 Richard Hsieh (149—77-72) vs. No. 24 Jose Romero (150—78-72); and Lauren Segovia (151—75-76) vs. No. 23 Jigg Oreña (156—82-74).

Samsung Tour 2nd leg up

A JAMBOREE field of 144 players aveia distintos honors a week after Raymund Sangil came from behind to clinch the championship days victory in today's inauguration of the Samsung Amateur Tour's second leg at the Mt. Elena Golf Club course in Cabanatuan, Laguna.

Highlighting the 54-hole competitions in various handicap classes is the showdown among three of the country's best lady golf hopefuls—Lora Roberto, Lucy Landicho and Aileen Tan—for the ladies' Class A plum.

Several jaggables led by the Iloilo stunt have also entered the fray in the Class D and C battles of the ladies side of the event sponsored by Samsung and backed by Rhea Tokyo, Galatoki, Philippine Airlines, Taylor Made adidas, EIG by Lenora Dalandan, Pink Pasta Boutique, Copperstone Sport and Nitgolf.

Hungry Detroit, hungrier Malone

SPECTATOR

M.S. Mendoza

AS expected, the Detroit Pistons have advanced to the NBA Finals. They did it by beating the Indiana Pacers, 69-65, last Tuesday for a 4-3 victory in the Eastern Conference Finals.

Also expected was Richard Hamilton running away with the MVP plum. Called "The Masked Man" for that plastic gear that he wears in every game to protect his face, Hamilton fired almost half of Detroit's total output as he almost single-handedly routed the Pacers' zone. Hamilton's 25 points yesterday was just a reflection of his consistent shooting in the best-of-seven series.

So you know the reason for that protective gear?

Well, Hamilton broke his nose twice playing basketball. The Detroit management then convinced him to wear the mask "because we need you to win games for us."

That wasn't only the last move on the part of Detroit spearheaded by president Joe Dumars to get the best out of basketball operations in his team. That was also the best basketball decision ever made by Richard Hamilton.

The Pitt had a Hamilton several years ago in Ramon Fernandez, the four-time PBA MVP who, unlike Hamilton, Tony was unbeaten, had no wear the hard plastic mask to protect a nose that had also been broken during a game.

Hamilton swapped another crucial role yesterday when he fished a flagrant foul from Ron Artest.

It happened this way:

With 3:57 left to play in the game, Hamilton hacked up, hitting Artest hard in the tummy during a Detroit offensive. The referees didn't see—or refused to see—Hamilton's masked offense.

In the next play, Artest maimed by giving Hamilton an elbow in the face. Because Artest lacked artistic expression in his revenge, the referees immediately spotted the willful manner behind it and slapped him a flagrant foul.

Hamilton capitalized on that, sinking two free throws to give Detroit its first lead of the game, 61-59, after Pacers Ben Wallace had tied the game at 58 with a left-handed semi-hook shot.

Basketball has always been a game of skill and talent. Add luck.

With 2:44 to go, another blatant—flustered—followed up a Chauncey Billups shot with a powerful thrust for a 63-59 Detroit margin.

When Reggie Miller missed a technical free throw on the ensuing play, Indiana looked doomed.

Hamilton jumped more and, after Artest flubbed a dunk, Tayshaun Prince, the gallant owner of the unusual corpus called Detroit's sixth man, iced it for Detroit with a long jumper from right.

It looked like the game was over after that 63-61 blast by the Pistons, until Jermaine O'Neal hit a basket that cut Detroit's lead to four, 65-61, 48.4 seconds left in the game.

But then, after a Detroit turnover, Artest fired an ill-advised three-point shot that was way off the mark, leading to a shot by Ben Wallace on a long distance assist by Prince. Prince is described poetically by sportswriter Brad Nessler as "Prince of the Palace." The game, as you know, was played at The Palace in Auburn Hills, Michigan.

Wallace's unchallenged basket gave Detroit a 69-61 margin, practically sealing the championship for Detroit as only 35 seconds remained in the game.

Detroit's sweep into the NBA Finals first will start on Monday, June 7, ended 14 years of waiting for the title-hungry Pistons.

The question now is, will Detroit be able to beat the Los Angeles Lakers, who also beat of The Feb Four Shaq, Bryant, Malone and Payton?

Yes, the Pistons are itching to reclaim the NBA crown.

But how about Malone and Payton?

The class vet guys are among the best in the NBA for years now and yet, for one reason or another, they have yet to own a championship ring. That inconsistency are that hungry too, and are can therefore expect them to go all out—raise hell, if need be—to restore a Lakers victory. As you know, in the case of Malone alone, the former Utah superstar swallowed his pride two years ago by accepting a Los Angeles slot—settling for a club's salary just so he could get his shot elusive NBA ring again. It's not the money anymore for Malone (and Payton?). It's that "Lord of the Rings" a.k.a. NBA ring.

The format is 2-3-2, meaning the first two games are set in Los Angeles, the next three in Auburn Hills and the last two (if necessary) in Los Angeles.

Lakers in Pistons?

Since Jordan left Chicago, I switched allegiance to Los Angeles.

* * *

FOOTBALL: Coach Boyong Partido, Siga Adormeo, let his assistants teach at Udall, old-school yesterday, minus the usual fanfare. That's because his family is now based in Gumaca, Quezon City. Coach Boyong's wife, Magel, and children, Mayo, Dada and Abigail (yes, we have letter "O") all now lived in Gumaca. Still, happy for Boyong coach. Mary, many more to come.

Williams sisters bundled out of French Open

PARIS—Both Serena and Venus Williams were upset as the French Open, losing its first seeded champion and a tournament for the first time.

Anastasia Myskina of Russia knocked out fourth-seeded Venus, 6-2, 6-4, last day, while Australian Qualifier of the Day Serena dominated No. 3 Seeena, 6-1, 2-6, 6-2.

"Everyone can have anyone. From the Open simply because you don't play anymore.

"We're going to push our legs and have," said Venus, whose 29 match winning streak ended with her third straight defeat.

Clearly the opinion that forced the siblings off the way the last half of 2003 and parts of this year hampered them—at their preparation and in another vital way.

They've led slightly intimidation. Justine Henin-Hardenne, No. 1-2, beating to their final after third, and showing up eight of 11 unforced errors Wednesday to 0000 throughout her tradition Opening 2003.

And, as their mother pointed out, with each more Grand Slam will unforced errors, the elite forgo will belief one worse.

"When you start making a lot of errors, you make opponents nervous," she said. "I've got to change some," and their confidence goes up," Clearwater Price said.

The other three women still around entered a combined total of one previous major semifinal appearance: No. 6 Myskina, No. 9 Elena Dementieva of Russia, and No. 14 Paola Suarez of Argentina, 2-0, 1, 6-3 winner over Maria Sharapova of Russia.

With Dementieva, a 2000 U.S. Open semifinalist, defeating No. 5 Amelie Mauresmo of France, 6-4, 6-3, it's the first time in the Open era (which began in 1968) that three of seeded's top four women lost on the same day.

Keeping with that theme, Tim Henman of Britain—never past the fourth round at a major other than Wimbledon—followed Juan Ignacio Chela of Argentina, 6-2, 6-4, 6-4, to exit up a world ranking against No. 9 Guillermo Coria of Argentina, who beat 1998 champion Carlos Moya of Spain, 7-5, 7-6 (5), 6-3. AP

CAPRIATI celebrates beating Serena.

PRINCE (left) and Hamilton of the Pistons do the high bump in the final moments of Game 6. —AP

NBA FINALS 2004 SCHEDULE
(Manila Time)

2-3 LAKERS ON BEST-OF-7 SERIES
Game 1 - June 7 @ L.A., 8:30 a.m.
Game 2 - June 9 @ L.A., 8:30 a.m.
Game 3 - June 11 @ Det., 8:30 a.m.
Game 4 - June 13 @ Det., 8:30 a.m.
*Game 5 - June 16 @ Det., 8:30 a.m.
*Game 6 - June 18 @ L.A., 8:30 a.m.
*Game 7 - June 21 @ L.A., 8:30 a.m.

*If necessary

'Bad Boys' seal finals vs Lakers

NEW YORK—Richard Hamilton picked up 21 points and Ben Wallace added 11 points and 12 rebounds to carry the Detroit Pistons into the NBA finals with a 69-65 win over the Indiana Pacers Tuesday.

The Pistons clinched the Eastern Conference finals, 4-2, and now play the Los Angeles Lakers, with Game One Sunday (Monday morning in Manila).

Tuesday's game was one of the lowest scoring playoff games in NBA history and featured the lowest scoring first half with 40 combined points (33-27 Indiana).

But that did not matter to the Pistons, who will play in the NBA finals for the first time since the "Bad Boys" won their second consecutive title in 1990.

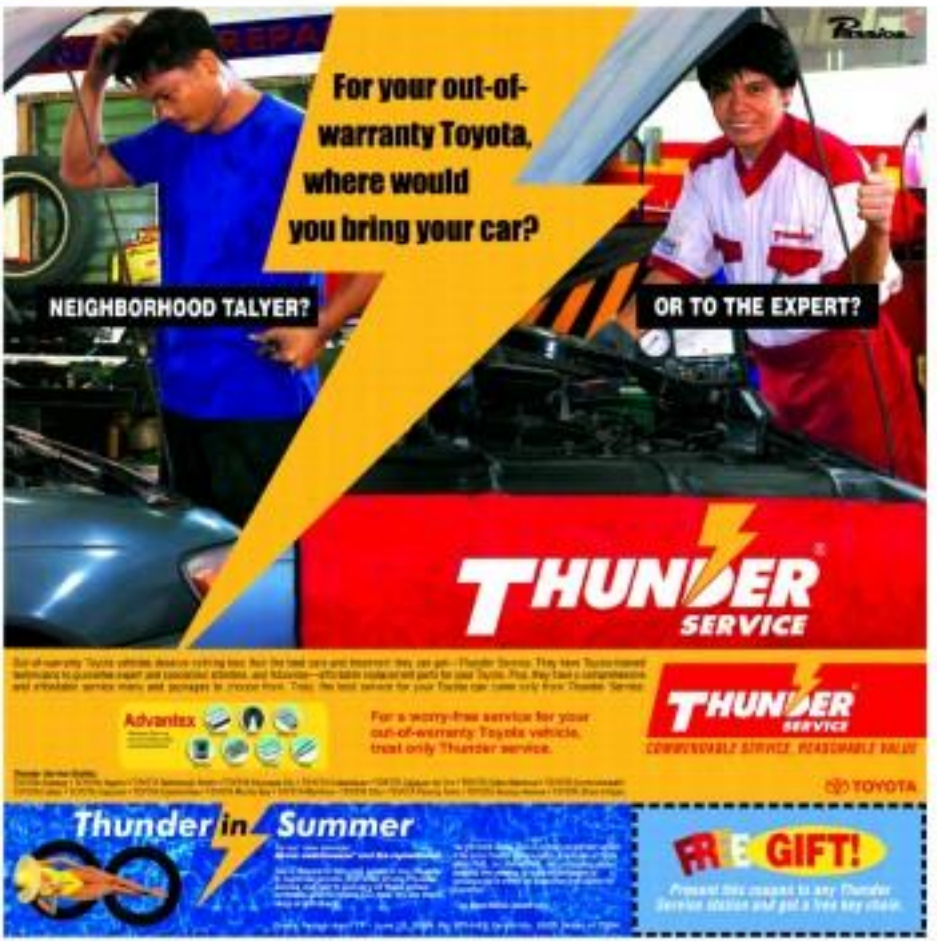
"It's crazy, it's unbelievable," Hamilton told reporters. "To be able to play for the championship of the world, for the NBA title, it's crazy man."

The Pacers were in front for most of the night but fortune took its first head of on a flagrant foul by Ron Artest with 3:57 left. Hamilton hitting two free throws to give the Pistons a 61-59 advantage.

Rasheed Wallace added 11 points and 11 rebounds for Detroit, who'll struggled badly—as always in the first half and was bested by the second at The Palace in Auburn Hills, Michigan.

The Pacers, who led the NBA with 61 regular season victories, were hit Tuesday by injuries to Jermaine O'Neal, Jermaul Tinsley and Artest.

O'Neal played well despite his knee injury, scoring 20 points and pulling down 10 rebounds. Austin Croshere added 12 points and seven rebounds. Reuters



Hole in the mind

BREAKTIME

Conrado R. Bunal III

ALL of a sudden, we are seeing a huge spike in prices of just about everything. Of course, since owners give us all sorts of reasons, such as their expensive vacation in Europe and the new nightclub-cum-dorm.

Another good reason they give us is the, well, (in-country just had clean, honest, and peaceful elections.

Certain media outfits already declared that the elections were not actually marred by cashless vote-buying, sore-up in the county lists, and so-called honest mistakes in counting, which never-only exposed certain cheats.

As a result of the clean, honest and peaceful elections, this core administration of Gloria's announced that Gloriaeta herself would handle domestic trade.

And as Gloriaeta's want to Cebu to back-to dorms, in words by campaigning same more with the mayors), and also by trying to convince some religious groups, including a cardinal, that we just had clean, honest and peaceful elections. Cross my heart.

There—price of just about everything are up, as this core administration is back to "work." To the store owners, maybe it means, oh-oh, more governmental spending.

* * *

BTW, the spike in the price of food in the wet markets may be the most noticeable, because it hurts at the most. Food producers are pointing at—who else—the store owners.

They say that the store owners are making all the money, and that this core administration of Gloriaeta should therefore impose price controls.

Sure, let's do it right away, since price controls can solve the problem in the same way that cigarette smoking can cure TB.

The bright idea of controlling prices in the markets was also the action-bit of the administration of Rajo Bilde when the price of rice went to the top of Mt. Pinatubo.

Luckily for us, as result of the brilliant solution, we suffered a severe rice shortage, which led to even higher prices.

* * *

Of course, on the refreshing increase in the price of just about everything, everybody agrees that it had something to do with the spike in oil prices worldwide.

And all the while, the guys down here in my batanga thought that energy cost increases for less than one percent of production cost of just about everything.

That man what we used to hear fourteen hundred say in media. Maybe from now on, we should not believe what we hear in media.

But then again, not too long ago, our beloved Neda announced that, actually, we should brace for higher inflation due to the impending oil price.

Maybe it was proof of the high credibility of Neda that, as soon as the announcement came out in media, the price of just about everything started to go up.

What do you think—maybe it is all in the mind? Ito, ha from it, the creation of the market was not HMO, it still I mean, come on, we needed that warning as much as a hole to the head, you noticing just it.

Really, if at all, clear, ex "mild" suggestions of high inflation rate from the Neda was like that bright ideas of price controls.

It caused the shoot out of everybody.

* * *

ONE reader called up to ask me for the initials of the "silent billionaire" who is getting a lot of attention from the top officials of the BIR.

All right, for the sake of the other "silent billionaires" in Brussels, the initials of the new up-and-coming BIR superstar are ... well, still a deep dark secret among BIR people.

In fact know, the BIR is trying to build a huge tax case against the so-called silent billionaire who, based on BIR estimates, may have a net worth of P30 billion.

For instance, the silent billionaire is said to have stashed one something like P1.5 billion to construct a building in Makati, in a 30-50 joint venture with a big developer.

Then, the rest of the building could rise to P3 billion—easily for the silent billionaire, based on BIR records, declared properties from the project of only P200 million.

Sorry, that should be believable to the BIR officials who are investigating the silent billionaire. The guy spent P1.5 billion only to get P200 million in return.

FILIPINO FUND, INC.

Notice of Annual Meeting of Stockholders

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that the Annual Meeting of Stockholders of Filipino Fund, Inc. will be held on Tuesday, June 8, 2004, 9:00 a.m., at the Function Room of Manila Polo Club, Makati City, Metro Manila, for the following purposes:

1. Calling of meeting to order
2. Certification of notice
3. Determination and declaration of quorum
4. Reading and approval of the minutes of the Annual Stockholders Meeting held on June 25, 2003
5. Presentation and approval of the Annual Report and other reports of the Investment Manager
6. Approval and confirmation of all acts of the Board of Directors and of Management during the past year
7. Election of the Board of Directors
8. Confirmation of appointment of External Auditors
9. Other Business
10. Adjournment

Only stockholders of record at the close of business on April 9, 2004 are entitled to notice of, and to vote at, said meeting.

Stockholders who cannot be present in person at the meeting in case you are not personally present, please complete, sign and date the proxy solicited and mail it promptly in the envelope provided. The accompanying addressed envelope is for mailing only and is postage prepaid.

Makati City, Philippines, 30 April 2004.

By order of the Board of Directors

VINCENT C. TANGENCO
Corporate Secretary

PLDT leads stocks rise

STOCKS rose yesterday led by dominant phone firm Philippine Long Distance Telephone Co. on hopes a slight rise in energy its mobile unit, Smart Communications Inc., and 65 percent owned Pilipinas Telephone Corp.

The main index closed up 8.39 points, or 0.50 percent, at 1,526.04 points amid cautious trade as investors awaited the results of a May 10 presidential election.

Philippine Long Distance Telephone Co. (PLDT), a quarter owned by Hong Kong's First Pacific Co. Ltd., jumped 1.47 percent, or P1.15, to P79.00.

Pilipino Telephone Corp. (Piltel), the country's oldest integrated mobile phone firm, was unchanged at P1.72.

"Players are buying indirectly as they expect the results of the elections," said AB Capital investment analyst Jose Vitaro.

"PLDT is the most active but I don't think it's because of the board deal. The week is still not fully valued. Based on the projected P1.6 billion net income for 2004, its share price should be around at P1,200 or lower."

On Tuesday, Smart said a bail ballot to overturn election of senator Pilot to back a P20.5-billion takeover offer. Reuters

Gov't revives plan . . .

(From page B-)

the 12-percent value-added tax on cellular phone cards was already a way of taxing text messaging.

The DOF, however, said the telecommunications sector was not yet adequately taxed, given its huge income from texting, which currently does not contribute to government revenues.

The DOF likewise refuted claims that taxing texting would be harmful for the operations of telecommunications firms. It said these companies have huge amounts of input VAT claims, and even spends cash on advertising that reduces their taxable income.

The proposal to tax texting is considered by some members of the business sector as a drastic measure to solve the government's gaping budget deficit. The government expects the deficit to reach P197.8 billion this year.

DISCLOSURES

DMCI Holdings Inc. disclosed that 11,100 preferred shares redeemed for the month of May will be delisted from the official registry of the Exchange effective June 1.

* * *

UNION Bank of the Philippines confirmed reports that the bank aims to sell its idle assets worth P100 million through property auctions or by entering into joint venture projects with developers.

* * *

ABACUS Treasury Systems Corp. will hold its annual stockholders meeting on June 29 at Makati Shangri-La, Makati City at 3:00 p.m.

* * *

EVER-GOTESCO Resources and Holdings Inc. announced the resignation of Cristina Aragon as member of the board of directors, effective May 21.

* * *

PETRON Corp. disclosed the resignation of Zyrel M. Ah Mike as vice president of the company effective May 21. It will hold its annual stockholders meeting on July 26 at 9 a.m. at the Manila Hotel.

* * *

PICOP Resources Inc. will hold its annual stockholders meeting on June 28 at 2:30 p.m. at the Makati Sports Club, Makati City.

* * *

SEMPUS Enterprises Co. Inc. disclosed that Edward Tordesillas resigned as director of the corporation.

* * *

SAN Miguel Corp. announced that the Thailand Ministry of Finance has granted the company the license that will allow it to produce beer in Thailand.

* * *

DIGITEL Telecommunications Philippines Inc. appointed Andrew Tinson as director representing Telefonica PLC. Completed by Cupasu Jr. Rosario

CURRENCY

Country	Unit	June 1, 2004 Euro Equivalent	June 1, 2004 Dollar Equivalent	June 1, 2004 Peso Equivalent
United States	Dollar	1.21210	1.00000	63.6000
Euro	Euro	1.00000	0.82500	52.4900
United Kingdom	Pound	1.66000	1.36950	87.1000
Switzerland	Franc	0.76600	0.63200	40.2000
Hong Kong	Dollar	0.15600	0.12870	8.1100
Indonesia	Rupiah	0.00012	0.00010	0.0063
Japan	Yen	0.01100	0.00907	0.5770
Malaysia	Ringgit	0.31900	0.26320	16.7400
Singapore	Dollar	0.71400	0.58900	37.4600
Taiwan	Dollar	0.03600	0.02970	1.8900
Thailand	Baht	0.03100	0.02560	1.6300
Australia	Dollar	0.87600	0.72270	45.9600
Canada	Dollar	0.88000	0.72600	46.1700
New Zealand	Dollar	0.80000	0.66000	42.0000
Saudi Arabia	Riyal	0.32300	0.26650	16.9500
Kuwait	Dinar	4.00000	3.30000	209.9000
Bahrain	Dinar	3.21000	2.64800	168.4000
United Arab Emirates	Dirham	0.33000	0.27230	17.3100
Qatar	Riyal	0.33300	0.27470	17.4700
Oman	Rial	3.14900	2.59800	165.2000
Iran	Rial	0.00012	0.00010	0.0063
Jordan	Dinar	1.70900	1.41000	89.6600
Lebanon	Pound	0.00080	0.00066	0.0420
Egypt	Pound	0.19600	0.16170	10.2800
Israel	Shekel	0.25200	0.20790	13.2200
Turkey	Lira	0.00000	0.00000	0.0000
Russia	Ruble	0.03500	0.02890	1.8400
Poland	Zloty	0.25200	0.20790	13.2200
Czech Republic	Koruna	0.03000	0.02480	1.5800
Hungary	Forint	0.00400	0.00330	0.2100
Slovakia	Koruna	0.02700	0.02230	1.4200
Romania	Leu	0.00000	0.00000	0.0000
Bulgaria	Lev	0.51100	0.42170	26.8200
Ukraine	Hryvnia	0.18600	0.15350	9.7600
Slovenia	Tolar	0.00400	0.00330	0.2100
Estonia	Kroon	0.06400	0.05280	3.3600
Latvia	Lat	1.70900	1.41000	89.6600
Lithuania	Litas	0.34500	0.28470	18.1000
Mexico	Peso	0.10900	0.08990	5.7200
Brazil	Real	0.40000	0.33000	20.9900
Argentina	Peso	0.34500	0.28470	18.1000
Chile	Peso	0.00200	0.00170	0.1100
Colombia	Peso	0.00050	0.00040	0.0260
Peru	Nuevo Sol	0.35700	0.29460	18.7300
Venezuela	Bolivar	0.00000	0.00000	0.0000
India	Rupee	0.02600	0.02140	1.3600
Pakistan	Rupee	0.02100	0.01730	1.1000
Bangladesh	Taka	0.02100	0.01730	1.1000
Sri Lanka	Rupee	0.01200	0.00990	0.6300
Nepal	Rupee	0.01700	0.01400	0.8900
South Africa	Rand	0.17600	0.14520	9.2300
Nigeria	Naira	0.00900	0.00740	0.4700
Kenya	Shilling	0.01600	0.01320	0.8400
Morocco	Dirham	0.10900	0.08990	5.7200
Tunisia	Dinar	0.79000	0.65180	41.4600
Algeria	Dinar	0.01700	0.01400	0.8900
Ghana	Cedi	0.00013	0.00011	0.0069
Zimbabwe	Dollar	0.00400	0.00330	0.2100
Botswana	Pula	0.21000	0.17320	11.0200
Namibia	Dollar	0.17600	0.14520	9.2300
Zambia	Kwacha	0.00030	0.00020	0.0130
Mauritius	Rupee	0.04200	0.03460	2.2000
Swaziland	Lilangeni	0.17600	0.14520	9.2300
Lesotho	Loti	0.17600	0.14520	9.2300
Malawi	Kwacha	0.00900	0.00740	0.4700
Uganda	Shilling	0.00070	0.00060	0.0380
Tanzania	Shilling	0.00100	0.00080	0.0500
Mozambique	Metical	0.00004	0.00003	0.0020
Angola	Kwanza	0.01300	0.01070	0.6800
Zaire	New Zaire	0.00000	0.00000	0.0000
Zambia	Kwacha	0.00030	0.00020	0.0130
Malawi	Kwacha	0.00900	0.00740	0.4700
Uganda	Shilling	0.00070	0.00060	0.0380
Tanzania	Shilling	0.00100	0.00080	0.0500
Mozambique	Metical	0.00004	0.00003	0.0020
Angola	Kwanza	0.01300	0.01070	0.6800
Zaire	New Zaire	0.00000	0.00000	0.0000

Higher salaries for gov't workers pushed

By Michelle V. Reyno

THE GOVERNMENT is set to push for the rationalization of salaries of employees working for the national government in a bid to level their take-home pay with highly compensated employees of some state-owned companies.

According to an official from the state agency Development Budget Coordination Committee (DBCC), the group would push for the updating of the old Salary Standardization law to promote equity in compensation.

The DBCC official said the Salary Standardization law, which was implemented in 1989, has made salaries of public employees look pitiful compared with the compensation received by employees of some government-owned and -controlled corporations (GOCCs) or government financial institutions (GFIs) that were exempted from the law.

"Alot of these [GOCCs and GFIs] are now exempted from the Salary Standardization law, and as the essence of the law has been facilitated," said the DBCC official.

Under the salary rationalization plan, the government will have to trim down its workforce by as much as 50 percent and use the savings to increase the salaries of employees that will be retained in public service.

The DBCC official said there was a huge gap between salaries of employees working for the national government and those working for state-owned corporations, especially in the middle- and upper-level positions.

The official said the estimated P80,000 monthly salary of a director in a GOCC was more than double the salary received by an employee of the same rank who works for the national government.

The DBCC source cited the Government Service Insurance System (GSIS), which is exempt from the Salary Standardization law.

The salary rationalization plan, said the DBCC official, also seamed to address the wage, pressed salary scale. The official explained that the gap between the salary of the lowest-ranking employee in a government agency and that of a Cabinet secretary has been declining.

The official said the government needed to address this to encourage better performance in public service. Rationalizing the salaries of state employees is also needed to entice more talent to work for the government.

The DBCC is set to push for the legislation of the rationalization plan.

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500,000 - 999,000	5.50	6.00	6.25	6.25	8.75
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5 million and up	7.50	7.75	8.00	8.25	8.75

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Market slump seen delaying Shell IPO

By Abigail L. Ho

THE ELECTRIFYING of the market continues to cast shadows on the listing plans of oil refiner Pilipinas Shell Petroleum Corp. as adviser Salamanca Bahlkiamy maintains its stance that now is not the right time for the company to go public.

"The market hasn't improved. We've been advised that it's not yet a good time for an initial public offering[s]," Shell general manager for external affairs Roberto Ramajo said in a telephone interview.

Shell and the Department of Energy had already agreed to look for a "mutually acceptable" financial advisor for the company's listing plan.

RA 8479 or the Downstream Oil Industry Deregulation Law of 1998 required a million mark so Shell to offer at least 30 percent of its shares to the public.

Shell was supposed to go public as early as February 2002, but this provision of the law could not be enforced after the Department of Justice issued an opinion that the deadline under the law was "only directory rather than obligatory."

Caltex Philippines Inc., which used to be a refiner before it converted its business to Batangas facilities into a depot for finished products two years ago, was also supposed to go public.

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BUSINESS

eTelecare buys US solutions company

By Tina Arceo-Dumlao

ETELECARE International, the country's biggest call center company, has acquired Phase 2 Solutions, one of the United States' leading providers of customer relationship solutions to the wireless and telecom industries.

eTelecare chair Fred Ayala said in an interview that the acquisition, which was formalized yesterday, marked one of the biggest investments by a Philippine-based company in the US and created one of Asia's biggest call center companies.

"As a result of this combination, a Philippine company has emerged as a global leader in a service industry where Filipinos have proven that they can be the best in the world," Ayala added.

The combined firm operates state-of-the-art centers in two continents, three of which are in the Philippines, with an employee base of 5,500.

The two firms posted $75 million in combined revenue last year, which was expected to increase to $125 million as business in both continents grows.

Ayala said eTelecare decided to acquire Phase 2 Solutions to give Clients a choice to base their customer relationship requirements either in the US or in the Philippines as a number of American firms still preferred to do their businesses in the US.

"Clients today want choice and they want scale. We will also leverage on their expertise in the wireless market in the Philippine operations provide," he added.

The Philippines has become one of the world's leading providers of call center services due to its affinity with American culture, its facility with the English language, adequate telecommunications facilities and large pool of university graduates willing to work in a call center.

eTelecare president Jim Fowler said the call center industry would continue to grow rapidly over the next five years as more Fortune 500 firms were taking advantage of the cost savings provided by local call center firms such as eTelecare.

"We come to them and say that they will get more for their money by outsourcing," Fowler explained.

As a result, eTelecare expects to hire 4,000 more agents a year, and will be opening its fourth center in Cebu by the end of the year.

eTelecare was spun off from listed IPO Technologies in late 2003. Its investors include foreign private equity firms Crimson, ABS and Electra and local investment house Atram.

RP, allies ask Opec to bike output

THE PHILIPPINES and several other oil-producing countries recently renewed their call to members of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (Opec) to unilaterally increase its oil production to avoid further hikes in the already high prices of crude oil.

Earlier, Energy Secretary Vincent Perez Jr., at the recently-concluded conference of energy ministers in Amsterdam, criticized Opec countries for "tackling the price issue [only] at meetings that Opec could have called to stabilize world oil prices."

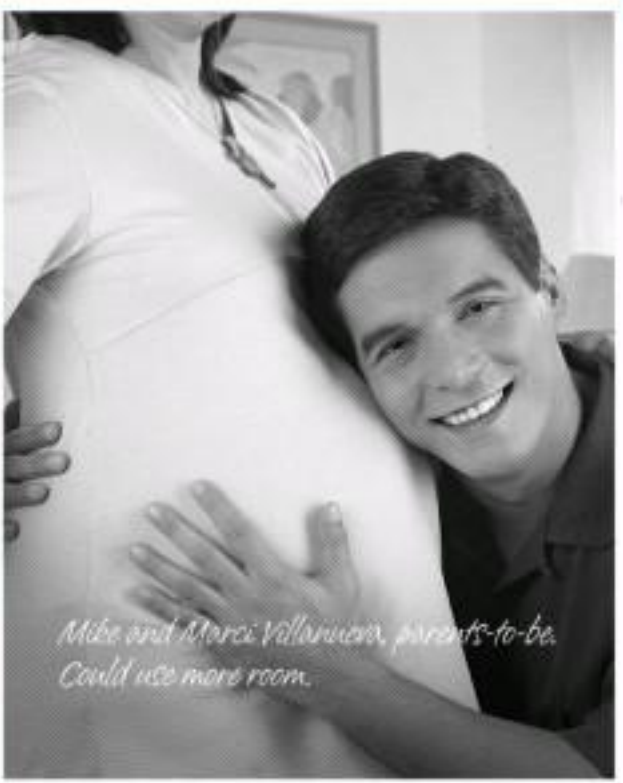
At the Amsterdam meet, the Philippines led an informal caucus of non-oil producing countries including Japan, China, South Korea and India which discussed possible cooperation to mitigate the impact of current high oil prices.

Perez said the call was being aired anew "in view of the disappointing response of Opec members." He said some 1.0 million barrels passed since the band has been breached. He pointed out that "the breach is causing an unduly unpredictability in the global oil market."

"These adverse developments in the oil markets is not only hurting oil-importing countries like the Philippines but is also negatively affecting the entire world economy," Perez pointed out.

Perez said that the "adverse trend in global oil prices is having non-oil producing countries to map out 'means that will] reduce our vulnerability to the volatile nature of oil pricing practices."

Perez said the country's allies had agreed to meet again sometime to formalize the cooperation.



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BOC collection exceeds goal

By Michelle V. Rosa

THE BUREAU of Customs collected P10.71B billion in May exceeding its monthly collection target for the fifth straight month now.

The May collection was 18.8 percent higher than the target of P9.66.1 billion. It was also 30.3 percent higher than the 10.186 billion collected in the same month last year.

This brings Customs's revenue contribution to the national government to P50.476 billion in the first five months of the year, which is 10.1 percent higher than the target of P45.871 billion for the period.

For this year, the BOC is tasked to collect P112 billion. The figure was increased from the original target of P108 billion.

The Customs attributed the positive revenue performance to improvements in its anti-smuggling measures and the automation of its operations. The BOC earlier said its computerization program, which allowed companies to transact business with the government agency through the Internet, had encouraged the payment of proper duties.

The Department of Finance said the BOC's collection target was increased in view of its encouraging performance early in the year. The DOF said a P112 billion target was appropriate for the BOC, which has been an overdog in revenue goals since last year.

The BOC and the Bureau of Internal Revenue have to meet their collection targets to help counter the country's gaping budget deficit.

The deficit is expected to reach P207.8 billion, down from last year's 195.9 billion.

RCBC eyes deal with Lehman

PHILIPPINE Rural Commercial Banking Corp. (RCBC) is optimistic it can conclude agreement with US investment bank Lehman Brothers on the sale of P9.9 billion in wanted loans.

The deal is expected to qualify for tax perks under the special purpose vehicle law, which governs the disposal of the banking sector's non-performing assets.

RCBC vice chair Lucio Yuma and after a dinner sponsored by the Institute of Corporate Directors said that he was expecting to clinch the deal with Lehman soon.

Asked whether RCBC had signed an agreement with the investment bank, he said "not yet" and added they were expecting to sign an agreement by the end of June.

As of mid-December, the bank's non-performing loans amounted to P9.9 billion, equivalent to 14 percent of its total loans during the period.

In acquired properties were placed at P9.05 billion, including those of its subsidiaries. RCBC earlier invited investment banks Credit Suisse First Boston, Colony Capital and Lehman to look at its offer assets. Elizabeth Sanchez

LUNCHBOX fillers
C2

LIFESTYLE

Lilia Chela Banal-Formoso

How to make crêpes, keep lettuce crisp and sub for hard-to-find ingredients

CRÊPE. Frozen for pancake, can be both dessert and main course.

DO you know how to make crêpes? Do you have a blueberry crêpe recipe? What is a crêpe?

SANDRA

Fried chicken, roast beef and hamburger I know crêpe, crêpes perhaps!

"Crêpe" is French for pancake. But crêpes are not exactly pancakes as we know pancakes to be. Crêpes are paper thin and very light.

There are two types of crêpes—dessert, which is filled with jam, custard, sweet cream and/or fruit; and savory, which is filled with meat, cheese or vegetables, more often with a sauce and served as a first or main course.

Crêpe Batter

1½ all-purpose flour
½ cups 2 tbsp water
¼ cmilk
3 large eggs
2 tbsp sugar (If you're making dessert crêpes)
2 tbsp butter melted and cooled
½ tsp salt

Combine ingredients in a bowl and whisk until the batter is lump-like. Let batter rest for an hour before cooking. Heat a crêpe pan or a non-stick skillet. Brush lightly with melted butter. Stir the batter and fill a ¼ measuring cup with it.

Pour the batter into the pan. Tilt and rotate the pan quickly to cover the bottom with a thin layer of batter and then turn the pan to the heat. Loosen the edge of the crêpe until the underside is golden brown. Quickly turn the crêpe, brown the other side lightly then transfer it to a plate.

Continue until you have used up all the batter. If the batter is too thick, add a bit more milk or water.

Fruit Filling

1 c fresh or frozen fruit of choice (blueberries, strawberries, mango, banana)

3/4 c sugar (adjust to taste)

¼ c water

1 tsp lemon juice

In a saucepan, bring sugar and water to a boil, mix until sugar is dissolved. Add fruit, simmer for about two minutes. Remove from heat and add lemon juice. Discard lemon juice.

Jam, jelly or canned fruit topping could be used instead of making the filling.

For filling in crêpes and serve with sweetened whipped cream.

I have always had problems with lettuce. Consistency their prize. Or serves such a season) that they will no last. What's the best way to wash, dry and store them? And if you will, please provide me with a good Honey Mustard Dressing.

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Jazzed-up 'baon'

By Dorothy MJ Ferreria
Contributor

WHAT to put in a kid's lunchbox that will not only be appreciated but will be nutritious, too, is a problem that causes with a new school year.

We suggest breaded pork chops jazzed up with a cheddar cheese breading, brownie-muffin model and chewy with lactose intose, and a classic pot roast made more nutritious with vegetable servings.

Pork Chops Milanese

4 pcs pork chops
cooking oil to taste
coarsely ground black pepper to taste

Breading:
1 c all-purpose flour
1 egg beaten with 1 tbsp milk or water
1 c breadcrumbs mixed with ½ c grated cheddar cheese
cooking frying

Aiding:
slices of fresh lemon

Remove the skin and fat of the pork chop, as well as the bone. Pound the meat with a mallet to make the slices thinner and more tender. Season with salt and pepper to taste.

Dredge the pork chops in flour, then dip in egg wash and coat with the bread crumb mixture.

Fry in oil until done. Serve with slices of lemon on the side.

Cocoa Powder Brownies (Version 2)

1 c melted butter
2 c white sugar
2 tsp vanilla extract
1 tbsp chocolate syrup
4 whole eggs, grated extra large
1 c sifted all-purpose flour
2/3 c sifted cocoa powder
½ tsp baking powder
½ tsp fine salt

Preheat the oven to 350°F. Line the bottom of a 7 to 11 inches baking pan (2 inches high) with baking paper. Set aside.

In a large mixing bowl, combine the melted butter, sugar, vanilla and lactose syrup. Mix well with a wire whip until blended. Beat in the eggs and beat well.

Add the remaining ingredients and beat until blended.

Pour the brownie batter into the prepared baking pan. Bake for 40-45 minutes or until a toothpick inserted in all four corners of the brownie comes out clean.

Classic Pot Roast

½ kg pork loin/shoulder
salt to taste
black pepper to taste
1 tsp dried rosemary leaves
3 tbsp pounded garlic
3 tbsp pounded garlic
½ c sliced onions
2 ½ c water
½ c soy sauce
3 pc bay leaf
Gravy
2 tbsp butter
2 tbsp all-purpose flour
di tipunga + enough water to equal 1 cup vegetables

Boiled baby potatoes, string beans and spinach

Remove the skin of the pork. Open up the meat by slicing it horizontally, butterfly fashion. Season with salt, pepper, rosemary and one tablespoon garlic. Tie the meat and secure with kitchen string. Set aside.

In a stockpot, combine the remaining one tablespoon garlic, onions, water, soy sauce and bay leaf. Place the rolled meat in the center and allow to boil. Simmer for the next hour or so, adding ½ cup of water as a time if necessary. Allow to simmer until fork tender. Chill briefly to make slicing easier.

To prepare the gravy, strain the accumulated liquid in the stockpot. Add enough water to total 1 cup liquid. In a thick saucepan, melt the butter over low heat. Add the flour and stir vigorously with a wire whip. Give the heat a few seconds to absorb the flour. Pour in the liquid. Continue stirring with a wire whip until the mixture thickens.

When ready to serve, arrange the sliced meat on a serving platter. Surround with boiled vegetables. Drizzle some gravy over meat slices. Serve the remaining gravy separately.

Note: Beef may also be used for this recipe. However, the cooking time will be longer, approximately 2-3 hours of simmering. Be sure to cut thin strips to serve.

Dorothy MJ Ferreria offers cooking, baking and cake decorating classes at Dorothy's Cooking School in Quezon City and in key provincial cities. Call 7217733, 4167966 or e-mail dorothyferreria@yahoo.net

Learn to cook different pastas

THE MAYA Kitchen will feature different recipes for pasta, a versatile and very popular dish, on June 5 to 9 a.m.-2 p.m.

Learn how to make a variety of sauces to match the different types of pasta.

Recipes included are Pasta Primavera in White Sauce, Ravioli with three kinds of stuffing (chicken, pork and beef), Rigatoni di Pesto, Spaghetti in Smoked Sauce, Angel's Hair Aglio Olio and Puttanesca Pasta.

Participants will also be taught how to make homemade pasta.

The Dessert Plus class, to be held June 5, 2-5 p.m., will cover graham-based Classic Mix Cannoli Window, almond Galletas, Tuile and Cookie and Bake Pandora, as well as tempting delights like Coffee Mousse, Mango Samurai and Chocolate Crepe.

Those who sign up will get free Maya Hotcakes Mixes.

The Maya Kitchen will conduct the Cooking 2 seminar on June 8-11, 9 a.m.-2 p.m. It will cover basic cooking principles on meal management, herbs, spices and condiments. Tips on proper storage of food, plus tasting the menu and maximizing Food budgets will be given.

At 2:30-6 p.m., the Baking 1 seminar will be conducted. It will cover making of breads, cakes and cookies for fun to earn more. Students will get a free Maya Baking Cookbook.

The Maya Kitchen is on the 8/F, Liberty Building, A. Arnaiz Avenue (formerly Pasay Road). Call 8921148/8911 local 108 or e-mail mayakitchen@pacific.net.ph.

Beefing up the menu

SENTRO 177 at Greenbelt 3 launches its new menu with over 20 fresh dish creations from the kitchen of Chef Vicky Reo-Pacheco, including the Fried Kuseng Pusit, organic native chicken roasted with Brazilian herbs and deep-fried until golden brown. The new appetizer menu with new fabulous dips—the aroma chili prawn dip and cheese garlic dip. Definitely a must-try for the resident Filipino. Sentro 177 is located at 2/L, Greenbelt 3, Ayala Center, Makati City. Call 757 0948.

SMOKED BANGUS IN OLIVE OIL

Sweetcastle Cuh and Cookery in Tagaytay City highlights its farmfed smoked bangus. Other Bisayan delights available such as Smoked Bangus Carbonara, Pita Sandwich with Smoked Bangus Flakes, Smoked Bangus Croquettes and Smoked Bangus Pate. The restaurant is located in front of the Provincial Administrative Office Compound, a few meters away from the Tagaytay-Silang rotunda, Sta. Rosa Road, Tagaytay City, with text (046) 41 0867.

GRILLA'S Grilled Oysters

OUTBACK Redmond launches numerous dishes. For appetizers, there's the new Typhoon Shrimp—"Honky Tonky" breaded onion strings with fishtail seasonings, and Prawn-o'-Shrimp—shrimp tempura battered and served with macaroni salad with dill. Fishtail also presents its new specialty dishes Mahi-Mahi—oven fired Manalitas, Barra Wrapped Manalitas, Reel and Shrimp Sauté and Tempted Surf Skewers, all complemented with garlic mashed potatoes, vegetables and baked rice. These exciting appetizers and beef dishes are available in all Outback branches in Ortigas, Greenhills and Alabang Town Center.

GRILLA Bar and Grill offers 19 spicy-Asian cuisine like BBQ Pork Platter, Inihaw na Pusit, Chicken BBQ, Inihaw na Bangus, Sisteng Tanigue, Pork BBQ and Chicken Tandoori. Call 8908135 (Makati), 4329801 (Ortigas), and 8196868 (Greenhills).

TIMPLA presents specialties such as Hamaon Crispy Pata Rouladi, Grilled Stew in Peanut Sauce, Braising Pork and Garlic Longganisa Pizza, Shrimps and Squid in Aligue Bisque Pasta and Grilled Pan de Sal served with Homemade Potato Salad. Timpla is located at the second floor of Ruano Center along Pasay de Roxas in Makati.

GERRY'S Grill opened recently its 12th branch in Cebu City. It offers the same top sellers like Sizzling Sisig, Lechon sa Dahon, Sinuglaw, Seafood Kare-kare, Beef Kaldereta, Crispy Pata and Spicy Garlic Fried Chicken. Gerry's Grill also has outlets in Cebu, Greenhills, Alabang Town and Makati. Call (032) 418 0000 local 89.

THE RED Crab has found a new home at 2/F Building, 1241 Estrella Makati, DC. It offers Sinuglaw Crab, Crab Mantawa, Singapore-style Crab, Fried Lapu-Lapu with Spicy Salt and Pepper Crab, Filipino-style Peppercorn Crab and Tinolang Alimango. Call 8194273. The Red Crab's other outlets are in Malate, Alabang Town Center, Shangri-La Plaza and Seafood Club-by-Red Crab in Greenbelt 2.

OUTBACK'S Bacon Wrapped Medallion

HMO clients complain about 'fine print'

THE CONSUMER
Marichu Tolauco Gironella

TWO years ago, a concerned medical doctor called the attention of health authorities to the clinical course of health care maintenance organizations (HMOs) in the country. HMOs became popular because, unlike traditional insurance policies, they provided a variety of prepaid health services to members.

But many HMOs were bankrupt a few years after gaining the trust of the public, hospitals, physicians, as well as financial institutions.

Dr. Edgardo M. Clemente has named six organizations that closed shop and managed to cheat paying an estimated P200 million in debt to financial institutions, as well as to members, hospitals and physicians. When an HMO closes shop, members cannot get back payments already made and cannot get reimbursement for medical expenses.

Until now, many clients still complain about HMOs. A most common gripe is the denial of medical care to members because of exclusion clauses and pre-existing conditions specified in policy contracts, but written in very fine prints. We will deal with the more serious concerns in our next column, after verifying the complaints.

Lying HMO agents

Rachel Baldemoro-C. Falcone says some HMO sales representatives misread policy conditions to win over a client and carry out "misrepresentations." She advises the public to make sure they understand company policy parameters fully on specifics.

He cites a leading healthcare company that refused to accept a prospective member because of his wife because she has reached 60 years old. According to him, the sales representative who promised her to enroll in the health care program for over-the-hill ones no matter the age limit.

"She should have been told by the sales representative... that the medication is only good until a member turns 60 years old," he says.

A note of praise

We end this column on a happier note. Customers of Manila Water Company in Barangay Ugong in San Juan are grateful to the company for emptying their sewer tanks free of charge. The residents also thank MWC for installing new pipes to improve water distribution (a program being undertaken in several other Metro Manila service areas).

Customers of the other water company can then see green with envy and are hoping the powers-that-will decide to give the whole distribution job to MWC.

E-mail the author at mg_tong@manila.com.ph

CHEWABLE COFFEE

Starbucks is turning your favorite coffee into something chewable this month. Coffee Jelly Frappuccino blended coffees is back. It's a blend of coffee, milk and ice, poured into coffee jelly pieces and topped with whipped cream. Get Coffee Jelly Frappuccino blended coffee and have a chance to win a trip to Palawan, flavors to flavor in. A total of 10 flavors/day, two-night vacation package/each lucky winners. For every P350 purchase of a Coffee Jelly Frappuccino, you get a flavors getaway Promotional Card to join the contest. Starbucks Philippines is owned by Rustan Coffee Corp., the authorized licensee of Starbucks Coffee International.

PHILADELPHIA Sandwich

BLUEBERRY Salad with fruit Strawberry juice

'Garden' restaurant opens

BON Appetit Patisserie & Café has dealt up with Rustan's Flower Shop to create a garden motif in its branch at Corte de Las Palmas in the Alabang Town Center.

Diners at the coffee shop will be surrounded by flower arrangements and other floral and accessories from the flower shop.

Another tables feature vase-wrapped tulips, flowering plants, salad chimes, oil lanterns and even small birds. Inside, the food itself is customized from the hamburger to the menu and food presentation.

The new Bon appetit menu includes basic dishes while adding new items for lunch and merienda. It serves fresh fruit juices and offers a wholesome lunch buffet. Specially recommended for hot days are the set all you can ice cream, and fruta loca, with an extra scoop of ice cream.

The flowers on display at the cafe are for sale. Trained arrangers will give customers the chance to see Rustan's Flower Shop look.

Among real garden accessories like scented candles, oil lanterns, sewing trays and baskets, ceramics, wind chimes, aquarium and even garden umbrellas are also for sale.

PETA Cheese Sandwich

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Continuing Education Programs

in partnership with:

287 Katipunan Avenue, Loyola Heights
Quezon City 1102 Philippines
Tel. Nos. 4364437 / 4364848 / 4364841
Telefax no. 4364836
e-mail: marketing@cca-manila.com

How to . . .

Dear Inggo D.,

I understand where you're coming from and I have the solution to your problem.

• Pick only fresh ingredients. Freshness is based on what you see, and what you see is what you get. Do not buy those bruised, discolored or wilted.

• Pick, row or slice leaves to desired serving size.

• Soak greens in cold water and vinegar solution (12 cups water plus three tablespoons white vinegar) for five minutes. Rinse in cold water.

• Spin dry preferable in a salad spinner. If you don't have one, use an old pillowcase and spin it away your head for a minute, as a cowboy would (an Inner Cow may even say "Yeehaw!") three it's done. You may sound and look silly but it works. Or you could wipe each leaf dry.

• Immediately store in filled zipper bags. I swear they work to last forever. Do not leave the greens out in the elements or they tend to wilt and loose their crispness. Refrigerate salad greens and only take out of bags before serving.

Honey Mustard

3 tbsp honey
1 tbsp vinegar, preferably cider
1 tbsp mustard, preferably Dijon
1/3 c canola oil
Whisk honey, vinegar, and mustard in small bowl to blend. Gradually whisk in oil. Season with salt and pepper. Adjust quantity of honey and mustard to suit your taste.

I would appreciate your help regarding commercial substitutes. Most of the ingredients for your recipes are not available in Bacolod and I only heard ingredients when I go to Manila, which is four times a year.

BIANCA GONZALEZ

I've always been anti-substitution unless the substitute genuinely is (the best actually learned from). Each ingredient in a recipe serves a purpose. As the ring goes, "Ain't nothing like the real thing, baby!" But since you're in Bacolod, here's a sure list of substitutes for some of the most common ingredients:

• 1 tsp baking powder—1/4 tsp baking soda plus 1/2 tsp cream of tartar
• 1 c. bread crumbs—1 1/4 slices cube dissolved in 1 c boiling water
• 1 oz. (bar) chocolate, chips—1 oz. Milo mixed with 4 tsp sugar and 1 tbsp oil
• 1 c. cocoa—1 oz unsweetened chocolate
• 1 c. cornstarch—4 c. honey
• 1 c. cup commercial—2 tbsp all-purpose flour or (in the form) 1 tbsp butter plus 1 tbsp flour, combine to make a cake
• 1 c. cake flour—1 c minus 2 tbsp sifted all-purpose flour
• 1 tbsp fresh herbs—1 tsp dried herbs
• 1 c. cup buttermilk—1 c plain yogurt or 1 c minus 1 tbsp milk + 1 tbsp lemon juice/vinegar (let stand for five minutes)
• 1 c. cup cream—1 c minus 1 or 2 tbsp cream milk + 1 or 2 tbsp lemon juice or vinegar (let stand for five minutes)
• 1 c. plain yogurt—1 c buttermilk or sour cream or 1 c cottage cheese blended till smooth

E-mail: lifestyle@visayan.com, give me the 411!